“NO LONGER OBJECTS OF HISTORY:”
AMERICAN INDIAN ACTIVISM
IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Any errors, omissions, or typos are the sole responsibility of my cat, he’s a jerk.

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Abstract: Native American activism after the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 has been an understudied, yet critical period of twentieth century Indigenous history. The events in the two decades that followed the alleged zenith of the Red Power movement saw a significant shift by activists towards international activism that would allow them to work around the United States government and bring attention to issues concerning American Indians in the United States. Through the development of the International Indian Treaty Council, Native activists secured some of their greatest successes in the twentieth century and placed indigenous politics as an important part of international discourse. Yet, the movement never managed to sufficiently define itself, and by the 1980s that failure divided the movement over the conflict between the Sandinista government and Miskitu Indians in Nicaragua. The divide of the 1980s was never rectified, and the movement drastically declined in the 1990s with in-fighting and conflict over who had the legitimate ability to claim they represented the old Native rights organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

"That Wounded Knee was the last stand for the American Indian Movement is the unspoken fear at the…national convention…."[1] - *The New York Times*, July 29, 1973

In April of 1973 residents of Pawnee, Oklahoma, a small town an hour west of Tulsa, were concerned about the impending American Indian Movement (AIM) annual convention to be held at the start of May. AIM, which caused tensions in town the previous year by occupying a BIA building, was currently in the latter stages of a seventy-one-day siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, and residents were concerned similar violence could erupt in Oklahoma.[2] Pawnee's mayor Glenn Wood argued the "AIM threat" hurt the town and the Pawnee Nation. While Wood hoped the convention would be peaceful should it occur, he also did not deny "vigilantes could spring up" and

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[1] "Indian Movement is Short of Funds," *New York Times*, July 29, 1973.

[2] On September 12, 1972, around fifty AIM members occupied the Oklahoma City office of Overton James, the governor of the Chickasaw Nation and state Indian education director due to concerns about management of federal monies. The BIA agreed to send representatives to a negotiation in Pawnee the following day and AIM members occupied the BIA building in Pawnee until a compromise was worked out. The Pawnee tribe was divided over support for the incident but the local paper said the compromise was the result of "A few bureaucrats in the Indian office at Washington who have the backbone of a jelly fish and the guts of an angle worm gave in to trouble makers. They should be fired." Quoted in "American Indian Movement" *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma.* Oklahoma Historical Society. Accessed from http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AM008 (Accessed on June 10, 2018).

potentially would be unable to control the violence should it break out.[3] The convention was postponed when the occupation of Wounded Knee continued into May and ultimately moved to the end of July in White Oak, roughly two hours to the east. Although the anti-communist John Birch Society tried to warn about the "revolutionary nature" and the potential threat of the convention, the only local worries related to "the hippie element [that] likes to follow these things."[4]

Originally billed as the largest gathering of Indians in a century, attendance at the July convention fell fall short of projections, with the actual number of people being closer to five hundred, well off the five to six thousand AIM had originally hoped for. The convention, however, was an important milestone for the organization. AIM's major leaders—including Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, and Russell Means—agreed that moving away from direct action protests and towards more traditional channels was necessary for AIM to remain relevant. While Banks argued he did not think in terms of moderation versus radicalism, he noted that the organization could not "deal with this government any longer with violent demonstrations. We've got to make sure Indian people aren't hurt. Realistically we have to hold back and follow a pattern of massive legislative effort."[5] There was no sign that AIM planned to scale back at the convention; if anything the presence of observers from five foreign countries signaled an expansion of

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[3] "AIM Threat Hurts Pawnee, Worried Mayor Contending," *The Oklahoman*, April 21, 1973.

[4] "Birch Society Offers Advice About AIM," *The Oklahoman*, July 14, 1973; "Indians Don't Worry Town Near Campsite," *The Oklahoman*, July 20, 1973. See Sherry Smith, *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) for a detailed study of the connections between native activism and the counterculture.

[5] "Is AIM Going 'Straight'? Yes, Say Group's Chiefs," *The Oklahoman*, August 5, 1973.

AIM's outreach for the next few decades. At least in theory, the AIM that came out of the White Oak convention would be an organization more focused on policies than public image, an organizational structure that fell closer to American Indian rights organizations that AIM had spent the last three years declaring old and ineffective. AIM and the Native rights movement that would continue through the rest of the 1970s were far more successful than the AIM that entered Wounded Knee, even if the television cameras and newspaper reporters largely did not follow.

This post-Wounded Knee AIM, however, has received far less scholarly attention. In their work on Native activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior write that "AIM had promised the Lakota revolution on Pine Ridge would be only the beginning, but the seventy-one day uprising instead marked the high tide of the most remarkable period of activism carried out by Indians in the twentieth century."[6] Chaat Smith and Warrior relegate the post-Wounded Knee period to an epilogue that chronicles the legal cases that arose from the Wounded Knee occupation and noting that while some "hardy militants" continued to picket events, the movement attracted little attention.[7] *Like a Hurricane* was not meant to be a comprehensive history of the American Indian Movement or Native activism writ large, but in the twenty years since its publication it has in many respects become just that.[8] In the last decade

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[6] Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, 1996, 269.

[7] Ibid., 279.

[8] There are a number of good historical monographs that fill in the historiography of the American Indian Movement and supplement this study. Contemporaneous accounts can be found in Stan Steiner's *The New Indians* (New York: Delta Books, 1968) and Robert Burnette and John Koster's *The Road to Wounded Knee* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974). Rex Weyler's *Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War Against the American Indian Movement* (1984)

historians have begun to expand our understanding of the period's activism, but the narrative remains fragmented and in parts largely untold. This study does not promise to a comprehensive history of the movement, or even of the period following Wounded Knee.[9] Instead it argues that Native rights and AIM in the post-Wounded Knee period stresses important issues for American Indian activists that remain relevant through the present day. In the decades that followed Wounded Knee, AIM was left in the uncomfortable position of attempting to define itself even though many outside observers had already attempted to do so. In the process of seeking additional funding sources, AIM entered into the international political arena, an area in which it managed to achieve some of its longest lasting impacts. Yet, at the same time, the organization found itself torn apart by internal and external debates about how the movement fit within the various Cold War political ideologies. As we will see, these conflicts, far more than Wounded Knee, ultimately undermined AIM's mission by the end of the 1990s.

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provides some background and provides discussion of AIM post-Wounded Knee, including discussion of international events. The most accessible overview of tribal sovereignty issues in the twentieth century is generally Charles Wilkinson's *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: WW Norton, 2005). Additionally, works such as Julie Davis's *Survival Schools: The American Indian Movement and Community Education in the Twin Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2013) provides an example of a new generation of scholarship that shifts beyond the national issues and chronicles AIM's influence on educational issues in Minneapolis.

[9] In particular, I largely avoid the case of Leonard Peltier, the Native American prisoner arrested and convicted for his alleged role in a shoot-out on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975 that killed two FBI agents. While Peltier is the highest profile Indigenous prisoner in the United States and the subject of Peter Matthiesson's best-selling *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse: The Story of Leonard Peltier and the FBI's War on the American Indian Movement* first published in 1983, his legal case is more complex than can be chronicled here without opening up a larger discussion unrelated to the dissertation. Furthermore, Peltier's case achieved considerable support in Europe but was a lesser issue in regards to Indigenous activism in the Western Hemisphere. In addition to Matthiesson's book, Steve Hendricks's *The Unquiet Grave: The FBI and the Struggle for the Soul of Indian Country* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005) provides an overview of some of the issues related to the case.

The purpose of this dissertation is to show what happened in the years following the occupation of Wounded Knee and attempt to understand whether or not that incident marked as drastic a decline in activism as some scholars have claimed. American Indian activism in the second half of the twentieth century was an ever-evolving series of groups and organizations that had various levels of connections and interplay. While the American Indian Movement was the most prominent, it was only part of a larger movement to secure indigenous rights in the United States. Even though no protest akin to Wounded Knee took place in the three decades following, activism made massive strides towards achieving many of the goals laid out in that seminal protest. Activists took their case to the international political arena, secured recognition at the United Nations, and prompted indigenous issues on a regular basis for the next thirty years. Nevertheless, as with any movement in its formative years, the international turn in indigenous activism had its far share of issues. In particular activists could not fundamentally agree on their position in relation to Cold War and Western political ideologies that should have been separate from the indigenous issues but nevertheless remained central to them.

Turning international following Wounded Knee was a natural progression of re-embracing an international identity for American Indians that was not only rooted in the nation-to-nation status tribal nations hold with the United States government, but also the long history of Native American activists seeking to fully implement their sovereign status in both the United States and the world. It certainly was not an overreach or a misguided course, but rather a parallel course to internal activism in the United States. Whether the movement could have charted another course and not divided itself in the

1980s cannot be entirely answered, but this dissertation hopes to at least provide a narrative of how that division happened.

In writing a dissertation that involves numerous big personalities and a narrative arc that ends in a tribunal and vicious in-fighting, the meaningful question is: what is the real historical significance of the period following Wounded Knee? Beyond charting a small part of the history of the second half of the twentieth century, this dissertation works in dialogue with a growing body of scholarship on Indigenous activism in the second half of the twentieth century that seeks to expand the narrative beyond the early 1970s Red Power Era. Furthermore, even though scholars have begun to look at the international connections activists in the United States drew with international organizations, few have focused on the Western Hemisphere and Latin America in particular. The most obvious source for transnational Indigenous activism has also been the least studied. Finally, many of the events covered have involved non-indigenous activists and their contributions to the movements. Scholars such as Sherry Smith and György Tóth have argued for the benefits of these non-Indigenous allies in their respective works, but while non-native allies are certainly needed, this dissertation also seeks to encourage scholars of the period to take a more critical look at those involved.[10]

Red Power Before AIM

The utilization of pan-Indian alliances among multiple tribes to advocate for Indigenous issues is a regular event in Native American history. The Pueblo Revolt

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[10] See Sherry L. Smith, *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) and György Ference Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty Between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016) as discussed previously.

during the Spanish colonization of the southwest, the Iroquois confederacy, or the rise of Tecumseh's confederacy in the early nineteenth-century Ohio Valley, all signal a long history of Native inter-tribal relations. As a result, the various activist movements that sprang up throughout the twentieth century are not necessarily novel inventions. As historian Bradley Shreve categorizes it, while the more militant movements of the 1960s and 1970s created new ideas, at their root they were "an evolution in intertribalism" that embraced the past while drawing inspiration from contemporary movements.[11]

Histories of twentieth century activism generally begin with the Society of American Indians (SAI), which formed on Columbus Day in Columbus, Ohio, in 1911.[12] The group brought together boarding school-educated Native Americans and non-Natives supportive of indigenous issues. A product of the Progressive Era, the organization's founders embraced "education, hard work, and…adapting their attitudes, values, and habits of life to those of the larger American society."[13] While SAI's assimilationist push is limited by today's standards, the SAI offers important antecedents to later activism. For one, as Kyle Mays notes, SAI leaders such as Charles Eastman sought to assert

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[11] Bradley Glenn Shreve, *Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Native Activism* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 16.

[12] Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity; Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971) remains the most comprehensive account of the SAI. Other works of significance include Philip Deloria's "Four Thousand Invitations: Situating the Society of American Indians" *American Indian Quarterly* 37 (Summer 2013), Peter Iverson's *Carlos Montezuma and the Changing World of American Indians* (University of New Mexico Press, 1982), Lucy Maddox's *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race, and Reform* (Cornell University Press, 2005), and Tadeusz Lewandowski's recent biography of Gertrude Bonin, *Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Sa* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2016) provides a much needed look at one of the most significant leaders of the period.

[13] Ibid., 31.

Indigenous identity at the transnational level through participation in the Universal Races Congress in London in 1911. The transnational aspect and parallels Eastman and W.E.B. DuBois drew between Indigenous and African American issues indicate that activists were keenly aware of the global political contexts into which Native issues had to interject themselves.[14] Additionally, as K. Tsianina Lomawaima argues in her article, "The Mutuality of Citizenship and Sovereignty: The Society of American Indians and the Battle to Inherit America," the SAI worked against the "false binaries" of the time to fight for Native issues through a process of layering. Layering acknowledged that "no one-size-fits-all answers exist in Indian country, but an effective strategy layers a political pragmatism attentive to local wishes and goals with determined, long-term work on national issues."[15]

As with activist movements in the second half of the twentieth century, the SAI was hindered by relations with non-Natives and the perception they held of the organization. The association quickly divided over the path it would take in advocating for indigenous issues. Thomas Sloan and Carlos Montezuma argued for a much more aggressive policy involving legal action against the Bureau of Indian Affairs and intensive lobbying in Washington. In contrast, Arthur Parker, the nephew of Ely Parker—the first Native American head of the BIA under Ulysses Grant—sought to plot a more cautious course in order to increase support from non-Native reformers. Historian Fred

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[14] Kyle T. Mays, "Transnational Progressivism: African Americans, Native Americans, and the Universal Races Congress of 1911," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 25 (Summer 2013).

[15] K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "The Mutuality of Citizenship and Sovereignty: The Society of American Indians and the Battle to Inherit America," *American Indian Quarterly* 37 (Summer 2013), 334.

Hoxie, in his overview of the era, writes that Parker's main goal was to build an organization rooted in apolitical and non-partisan issues so that it could "demonstrate our sanity…and proceed cautiously" in the hopes of receiving "help from quarters that we little suspect."[16] The Society of American Indians largely dissolved by the mid-1920s, wrecked by controversies relating to the use of peyote in the Native American Church. While limited in scope and problematic by later standards, the SAI marked a critical turning point in Native activism, and its legacies carried through for decades after it ended.

While much of the historiography of Indian policy during the 1930s rightfully focuses on BIA head John Collier and the "Indian New Deal" that accompanied Franklin Roosevelt's larger New Deal, activism went well beyond these policies. Collier, who grew to support Native issues after visiting Taos Pueblo in New Mexico, sought to reform a system suffering from serious problems. The Merriam Report in 1928 chronicled an excess of issues that derived from the assimilationist polices of the previous thirty years. With the rise of individual allotments and the end of communal landholding, the Merriam Report documented widespread poverty on reservations. Collier's program attempted to return control, at least in theory, to reservations and Native Americans themselves, along with ending the policy of individual allotments. Through the Indian Reorganization Act, Collier and the Bureau of Indian Affairs sought to give tribes control of their politics through the formation of new tribal or business councils. While Collier's original goals were stronger than the weakened IRA that passed

[16] Frederick E Hoxie, *This Indian Country: American Indian Activists and the Place They Made*, 2013, 259.

Congress in 1934, both versions utilized western political traditions and undermined the traditional tribal governmental structures and chiefs. The new policies proved controversial, with activists such as Seneca Alice Lee Jemison telling Collier, "We are tired of experiments. Try this out on someone else."[17] Collier toured Indian Country advocating for adoption of the new constitutions, but the reforms were rejected by tribes ranging from the Senecas to the Navajos. The Lakotas on Pine Ridge, primarily driven by the more assimilated members, voted to adopt the new tribal council, a decision that would be the centerpiece of criticism forty years later during the occupation of Wounded Knee, which is covered in chapter one.

At the same time that Collier's reforms were limited and problematic, the shifting winds in Washington allowed for greater involvement of Native Americans in their own affairs. Leaders such as D'Arcy McNickle (Salish) and Robert Yellowtail (Crow) found themselves either working for the federal government or intimately involved in tribal politics in ways that would have been impossible decades before. These new leaders would go on to lead the next generation of activists in the post-World War II era that began with the creation of the National Congress of American Indians in Denver in 1944. The outbreak of World War II and the large-scale support of the war effort by the American Indian community created "a new spirit of common purpose." Between experiences overseas and migrations to urban centers to work in factories, Native Americans exited the war awakened to the issues in Indian Country and directed their anger at "the institutions, the laws and regulations which impoverished Indian life." As

[17] Ibid., 299.

Fred Hoxie notes, the formation of the NCAI came at the same time that John Collier resigned from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, creating a vacuum that was ultimately filled not by another non-Native head, but by a wealth of Indian voices from across the country.[18]

The NCAI also arrived at an important time to counter the reactionary conservative shift that developed in the aftermath of World War II. Fearful of a return to the economic crisis of the Great Depression, Republicans, who secured control of Congress in 1946, sought to reduce the federal budget. Coupled with the rise of the Cold War mentality, communal landholdings on reservations and government funding for tribes came under attack by Republicans such as Utah Senator Arthur Watkins. Proclaiming that he would follow in the path of Abraham Lincoln, Watkins proposed the policy of termination that would eliminate the government to government relationship tribes had with the federal government, instead placing tribal nations under the jurisdiction of the state in which they resided. Watkins argued that the policy would enable Native Americans to be "free." While a relatively small number of tribes were ultimately subjected to the policy, the results for those tribes were devastating. The Menominees in Wisconsin lost successful businesses in the process, and the Klamath and other tribes experienced similar issues.[19] The termination policies were widely decried in

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[18] Ibid., 317.

[19] For more on the Menominees businesses prior to termination see Brian C Hosmer, *American Indians in the Marketplace: Persistence and Innovations Among the Menominees and Metlakatlans* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2009). Donald Lee Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1986) remains one of the critical studies of federal Indian policies during the termination era.

Indian Country for seeking to undo treaty obligations, a sign of the shifting goals of activists from the era of the Society of American Indians.

At the same time, the United States government began a process that sought to voluntarily re-locate Native Americans to large urban centers. While Native Americans had begun migrating to cities in large numbers during World War II to take advantage of job opportunities in war-related manufacturing, the Relocation Program provided government funds and job training and placement opportunities and contributed to a further rise in urban Indian populations. Many of the major leaders of the Red Power era took part in the relocation process while for many also creating a divide between more conservative reservation politics and the new urban organizations that would ultimately develop. The relocation program has received considerable attention as an under-funded failure that sought to strip Indians of their connections to the reservations, the project was an integral part of the formation of twentieth century Indian identity and the divide between reservation and city was never as stark as portrayed.[20]

By the early 1960s, the NCAI had been around for a decade and a half and had effectively fought back against the termination policies of the 1950s. Yet, the

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[20] In his autobiography Russell Means cites his experiences with the program in Cleveland, including substandard housing in a poor neighbor and a lack of promised opportunities, as a galvanizing force in his decision to become active in Native politics. Russell Means with Marvin J. Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, 141-149. See Douglas K. Miller "Willing Workers: Urban Relocation and American Indian Initiative, 1940s-1960s" *Ethnohistory* 60 (Winter 2013), 51-76 for a study that moves beyond the old narrative and shows how Native Americans asserted agency and utilized program to their advantage. There are a number of works on Urban Indians, some of the most significant include Nicolas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration & Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), Rosalyn R. LaPier & David R.M. Beck, *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893-1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015) and James B LaGrand, *Indian Metropolis: Native Americans in Chicago, 1945-75* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

organization was caught in an internal debate about how to advance its policies and advocate for Native American issues with tribal leaders in the late fifties, finding themselves debating a specific role for tribes in American life. As Hoxie writes, the major questions included, "Were [tribes] primarily local associations of needy people whose goal was to lobby Congress on behalf of their members?…Were tribes primarily in the business of generating federal dollars and improving living conditions? Or alternatively, should modern tribes be viewed as embryonic states…?"[21] While the NCAI vacillated between defining tribal positions within the federal government and developing a "domestic 4 point plan," a younger generation of activists spurred by the optimism of the early 1960s and the Kennedy presidency sought to redefine Native activism.

Red Power

The first American Indian to use the term "Red Power" to signify American Indian activism was a Ponca fancy dancer named Clyde Warrior. A traditionalist at heart, Warrior also fully embraced a new wave of activism in the early 1960s. When he ran for the presidency of the Southwest Regional Indian Youth Council in 1961, Warrior delivered a short yet fiery speech to the assembled college-age delegation. After the other candidate's thirty-minute speech, Warrior simply pointed to his arms and said, "I am a full-blood Ponca Indian. This is all I have to offer. The sewage of Europe does not run through these veins." As Warrior biographer Paul McKenzie-Jones notes, the speech not only won Warrior the presidency, but it "was the first time in generations that such direct,

[21] Hoxie, *This Indian Country*, 339.

condemnatory, and anticolonial language had been uttered publicly by an American Indian toward the hegemonic American settler culture."[22]

Following the victory, Warrior and the SRIYC would become involved in anthropologist Sol Tax's Workshops for American Indian Affairs, ultimately moving beyond a regional focus and changing the organization's name to the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). Comprised of younger activists than the NCAI, the Youth Council generally got along favorably with the older organization. With the election of Vine Deloria, Jr. as executive director, the NCAI also began to embrace the new youth movement in Indigenous activism. Tensions rose however, when Warrior and other NIYC members including Mel Thom and Warrior's wife, Della, crashed an NCAI parade in 1966. Driving a rented convertible, the group drove the parade route with hand-made signs that read "Red Power - National Indian Youth Council" and "Custer Died for Your Sins" on either side.[23] The incident not only marked a break between the younger activists and the most conservative NCAI leadership, but it was also the first public use of the term "Red Power." Building on the recent invocation of "Black Power" by Stokley Carmichael, NIYC promised a new avenue of Indigenous activism that was much more public than the NCAI's usual process of legislative activism and negotiations.

At the same time that the NIYC's more forceful tactics upset older activists, they signaled a shift in Indian Country. Just two years later Vine Deloria, Jr., now resigned from his position as the executive director of the NCAI, published his seminal work,

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[22] Paul R. McKenzie-Jones, *Clyde Warrior: Community, Tradition, and Red Power* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 46.

[23] Ibid., 72-73.

Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto. The book quickly became a best-seller, among both Native Americans and non-Natives. Written with both a sense of humor and a stinging critique of Indian policies, the book served as the basis for the next era of activism. In his most critical chapter, Deloria Jr. assessed the relation between African-American civil rights struggles and Indigenous movements, arriving at an ambivalent conclusion that Indian nationalism was being overlooked in attempts to merge the two minority struggles into one amorphous campaign. While noting Native and African Americans both had political conflicts with the "white man," they were fundamentally different. Whereas African American leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. sought to integrate into society, Native Americans in many respects sought to remove themselves.[24] While the title become the bumper sticker slogan of the rising Red Power movement, the book provided guidance for activists as they approached the end of the turbulent 1960s.

At the same time that Natives began to utilize a more vocal embrace of tribal identity, the counterculture of the 1960s saw "playing Indian" as a way of spurring conservative policies and finding a more "authentic" identity away from the conformity of the 1950s.[25] During the decade the two interacted as large parts of Indian Country witnessed protests asserting indigenous treaty rights that drew support from the counterculture. In Washington State, tribal leaders in the mid-1960s sought to exert their treaty-guaranteed rights to fish without state inference. When the State cracked down on

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[24] Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 168-196.

[25] For more see Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), especially 154-192; Sherry Smith, *Hippies, Indians and the Fight for Red Power,* in particular chapter 4 and the history of the connections between the "back to the land" commune movement and indigenous ideas.

"illegal" fishing by tribal members, local and national leaders rallied and staged "fish-ins". The movement attracted both indigenous peoples and non-Natives, with celebrities such as Marlon Brando and Dick Gregory taking part. While Brando and Gregory's status brought attention, many leaders were also disheartened that television and newspaper reporters only showed up when the celebrities were around. Furthermore, the NIYC helped organize Brando's symbolic "fish-in" appearance and found itself derided by locals as "college kids in sports jackets who showed up merely to make themselves look good."[26] The animosity between locals fearful their concerns were being overshadowed would be a central issue in the occupation of Wounded Knee nearly a decade later.

The late 1960s marked a critical turning point for Native activism. In 1968, Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, and Eddie Benton-Banai, among others, formed the American Indian Movement in Minneapolis. The founders met while serving time in Minnesota's Stillwater Prison and used their time in prison to read works by Black Power activists and form programs to support Native cultural and religious ceremonies.[27] Upon release from prison and moving to Minneapolis, the leaders sought to return to normal lives but found themselves increasingly moving away from their day jobs and towards activism. The city's Native community along Franklin Avenue was chronically over-policed and over-represented in the state's prisons. Utilizing the tactics of the Black Panthers, AIM monitored police radios in order to get ahead of police raids on bars frequented by Natives. If the group arrived prior to the police, they would clear the bar;

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[26] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 46.

[27] Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 58-60; Bellecourt and Lurie, *The Thunder Before the Storm*, 29-40.

whereas, if they arrived afterwards, they would guard against police brutality and provide rudimentary legal advice to the arrestees. The activities ultimately proved successful, cutting the number of Native Americans arrested in the city and bringing attention to AIM's activities from Natives outside of the Twin Cities' vibrant indigenous community.[28]

At the same time that AIM was organizing to counter police brutality in Minneapolis, another group of Native Americans in San Francisco made the first major occupation of the Red Power era. Coming in November 1969, the Indians of All Tribes (IAT), a loose collection of younger, college-educated activists headed by Mohawk Richard Oakes, took over the shuttered Alcatraz Prison. After closure in 1963, local leaders negotiated with the federal government to decide what to do with the old federal prison and solicited proposals, one of which was an Indigenous request that the island be turned into a Native cultural center. After the San Francisco Indian Center burned to the ground, activists travelled out to the island and claimed it as Indian Territory, arguing the island was excess government property and should be returned to Native Americans under the provisions of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. While the legal rationale was on shaky ground, the utilization of the treaty signified the importance of treaty rights for Indigenous protests. The protest quickly won support not only from San Francisco's liberal community, but also from across the United States.

In a provocative statement that highlighted the mistreatment of American Indians, IAT argued the federal government should have no problem turning over the

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[28] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 128.

land because "Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian reservation," noting among other things, "The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others."[29] IAT also highlighted the conflict between the older activism of the NCAI and the new youth movement when they argued in the manifesto "Our Children Will Know Freedom and Justice" that "Many potential leaders have fallen by the wayside because they have allowed themselves, or were forced by others, to become so involved in the intricacies of bureaucracy that their basic goals were forgotten."[30]

The occupation of Alcatraz did not formally end until June of 1971, when the Coast Guard removed the last fifteen holdouts, but it fell out of the public consciousness by the middle part of 1970. Red Power, however, remained, and protests spread across the country. The most significant of which was the Trail of Broken Treaties that culminated with the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in November 1972. The cross-country protest, organized by AIM and treaty rights activists including Hank Adams, travelled across the country from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., crafting a public statement and list of demands they sought to present to the Nixon Administration. The protest, however, was hampered by poor organizing. After arriving at lodgings that consisted of a rat-infested church basement, the group moved to the BIA building and demanded a meeting. Opinions on what happened next run the gamut from deliberate takeover to miscommunication, but the group ended up occupying the building for the next week and re-christening it the "Native American Embassy." Nixon in the

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[29] Ibid., 29.

[30] Daniel M. Cobb, ed., *Say We Are Nations: Documents of Politics and Protest in Indigenous America Since 1887* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 158.

final week of his 1972 re-election campaign, largely ignored the protest, leaving negotiations to lower-level staffers. While activists ultimately secured meetings with the administration, the protest ended with the building ransacked and numerous stolen files that activists alleged incriminated the federal government for a variety of crimes against Native Americans. The damage to the building and theft of files has been the major criticism of the protest but AIM leaders have long claimed the damages resulted from agent provocateurs sent in by the FBI to destabilize and undermine the protest. Nevertheless, the protest both asserted the importance of treaty rights for Indigenous activism while dividing opinions on AIM within Indian Country and outside of it.[31] Three months later, AIM would again find itself drawing national attention with the occupation of Wounded Knee.

Expanding Beyond Traditional Red Power

In his history of Native activism during the 1960s, historian Daniel Cobb highlights a story from Vine Deloria, Jr. about the issues of trying to discuss the events that did not get national media attention during the decade. Deloria, Jr. had been invited to a conference that would discuss activism in the 1960s but rejected the invitation when he realized the only other participant to be active for most of the 1960s was Comanche activist LaDonna Harris. In responding to the request, Deloria, Jr. told the organizers,

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[31] More information of the Trail of Broken Treaties can be found in all of the autobiographies of AIM leaders along with Vine Deloria, *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), which provides an academic assessment of the movement and its goals. Additionally, Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 149-168 provides a good concise overview of the event. For a negative appraisal of AIM see George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 111-146. Castile labels the BIA protest a "trash-in."

"What you're talking about really is moving everything that happened in the Seventies into the Sixties and pretending that it happened then….You guys have got everything all screwed up. I'm not going to that thing."[32] The protests between 1969 and 1973 generally draw most of the attention in regards to discussion of Native activism in the second half of the twentieth century, but these protests were only a minuscule amount of the history when it comes to Indigenous engagement since 1950. This work will build on the recent thread to expand beyond that four-year time span, and showcase under-analyzed events.

In chronicling the history of the American Indian Chicago Conference and the Workshop on American Indian Affairs, both critical components of early 1960s Native American activism, Cobb shows how young activists confronted both indigenous issues and the larger Cold War era. In the process of reading Felix Cohen's article, "Colonialism, U.S. Style," participants began to draw parallels between reservations and international affairs. One participant noted that he had "never before thought of the Indians as compared to colonialism. I thought colonialism existed only in the older countries like southern Europe or in places such as Africa." The epiphany allowed members to more concretely realize the problems facing American Indians, in particular the lack of local control on reservations.[33] While looking broadly allowed many of the younger generation to better understand the world around them, many of the older generation and those in the federal government were deeply suspicious. Oliver LaFarge and LaVerne Madigan of the older Association on American Indian Affairs rejected the

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[32] Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 1.

[33] Ibid., 64.

Chicago Conference and organizer Sol Tax in particular, finding the whole affair "woolly."[34] As Cobb notes, the Cold War shaped both generations, albeit in different ways. Whereas older advocates took a more conservative approach, younger activists like Clyde Warrior and the National Indian Youth Council were defining a new path for activism embodied in one participant's inversion of the phrase "Better dead than Red" to "Better Red than dead."[35] In addition to Cobb's work, historians such as Thomas A. Britten and Paul McKenzie-Jones have covered activism in the 1960s that was more procedural than protest; both, nevertheless, served as "quiet champions" of indigenous issues.[36]

In addition to scholars studying events prior to the early 1970s, a fruitful avenue of research and one this study follows, is expanding the concept of Red Power beyond the confines of the United States. This transnational history, or "trans-indigenous" as Chadwick Allen has proposed, serves as an important corrective in understanding how indigenous peoples interact with others across imposed international borders. As Allen has outlined at various points, activists were "both overtly enabled and intimately structured by the complexities of transnational networks, those by-products of the histories and ongoing legacies of various colonialisms."[37] While scholars have examined

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[34] Ibid., 49.

[35] Ibid., 68.

[36] Thomas A. Britten, *The National Council on Indian Opportunity: Quiet Champion of Self-Determination* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014); Paul McKenzie-Jones, "Evolving Voices of Dissent: The Workshops on American Indian Affairs, 1956-1972," *American Indian Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2014): 207–36; McKenzie-Jones, *Clyde Warrior*.

[37] Chadwick Allen, "2014 NAISA Presidential Address," in *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2 (Spring 2015), 9; Ibid., "A Transnational Native American Studies? Why

connections between the American Indian Movement and international issues in the past, in recent years historians have conducted more detailed studies on the issue.[38] Paul Rosier's *Serving Their Country* serves as a helpful companion work to Cobb's *Native Activism* providing additional discussion of the international dimensions of American Indian ideas in the twentieth century. Rosier highlights how the protests of the 1960s and 1970s become cloaked in Cold War ideology; in the process American Indians had to contemplate the dilemma of "hybrid patriotism" of balancing allegiance to both the United States and their tribal affiliations.[39]

In terms of detailed studies of American Indian interactions with international organizations, European groups and supporters have received the most scholarly study. This development is probably a natural continuation of the discussion of the European embrace of indigenous culture that traces back to the novels of Karl May and the popularity of Wild West shows on the continent. György Ferenc Tóth's recent book, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie,* exemplifies this point by devoting the first chapter to chronicling the German affinity for Karl May's Winnetou character. Tóth's central argument is that American Indians conducted transnational diplomacy and in the process "performed their ideas of Indianness and Indian sovereignty vis-à-vis the U.S. nation-state" and Central Europe proved the most fertile ground for support because of a

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Not Studies That Are Trans-Indigenous?" in *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4 (2012), 1-22.

[38] For an early assessment of AIM and Europe see Bernd C. Peyer, "Who is Afraid of AIM?" in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays,* edited by Christian F. Feest (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 564.

[39] Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 7.

"sense of identification, romanticized notions of revolution, and a countercultural community."[40] In focusing on the period after Wounded Knee, Tóth provides a helpful addition to the historiography, but his work provides only a limited and at times less than critical assessment of the interactions between AIM and Central Europeans. In particular, Tóth ignores questioning what the romanticism Central Europeans had of Native Americans meant for the connections AIM made in the region. In one instance AIM activists toured the region, and Tóth quotes Clyde Bellecourt in acknowledging that the highlight of many of the events was native drumming that was rooted in part in old "wild west" stereotypes of the "savage Indians." Furthermore, Tóth notes that the "highlight of the evening" was not a Native performer or speaker but rather an East German folk singer.[41] In a similar manner, Kate Williams's dissertation, "Cyd-Safiad (Standing Together): The Politics of Alliance of Welsh and American Indian Rights' Movements, 1960s-Present" provides a comparative account of the two movements and how they played off each other over the last half century.[42] Both studies are rooted in personal histories—Tóth is from Hungary, and Williams is Welsh—and provide helpful but limited understanding of transnational aspects of American Indian activism.

While works like Tóth's and Williams's serve as valuable contributions to the historiography of indigenous and transnational activism, they are both rooted in the

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[40] György Ference Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty Between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 2,3.

[41] Ibid., 82, 84.

[42] Kate Williams, "Cyd-Safiad (Standing Together): The Politics of Alliance of Welsh and American Indian Rights' Movements, 1960s-Present," Ph.D Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2012.

connections between American Indians and Europeans. While Williams's work draws parallels between American Indian issues and Welsh indigeneity in relation to the British empire, fewer accounts exist connecting indigenous activism across borders in the latter half of the twentieth century. This study endeavors to expand the historiography on the subject and highlight the ways in which activists formed indigenous spaces during the Cold War that transcended national boundaries and ideologies. In doing so they not only built new connections but also expanded the understanding of indigeneity. Just as Martin Luther King, Jr. looked at the South Vietnamese and saw himself, American Indian activists looked to the four directions and saw themselves and the issues they had been confronting at home for decades.

Chapters Overview

The following chapters move chronologically and seek to provide a narrative of one part of the post-Wounded Knee period that focuses on the attempts to build transnational alliances in the Western Hemisphere and promote indigenous rights at international forums such as the United Nations. Beginning with chapter one's narrative history of the occupation of Wounded Knee, I argue that the occupation became obscured by competing narratives that sought to make the occupation an allegory for the ongoing war in Vietnam. Whereas the counterculture and other minority rights groups sought to draw parallels between the American Indian and the South Vietnamese, both seemingly were subjugated to oppressive occupations by American soldiers, conservatives viewed the event as a natural outgrowth of the tumultuous 1960s and a potential communist threat. Both narratives highlight how AIM, even as it advocated for Native rights and

sovereignty, found itself pulled into a Cold War narrative that had little room for third parties.

Chapter two focuses on the development of the International Indian Treaty Council and the movement to secure representation at the United Nations, brought on in large part as a way to work around the issues the organization faced domestically. In contrast to the legal fights and organizational in-fighting at home, the movement overseas brought AIM additional support and helped foster the creation of UN policies that continue to promote indigenous rights in the twentieth-first century. At the same time AIM expanded overseas, the movement had to balance its international successes with the responsibilities to Native Americans at home. This balancing act culminated in 1978's Long Walk, a return to the protests of the early 1970s, yet one that seemingly saw greater successes with Congressional passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act and American Indian Religion Freedom Act. The successes of the period, however, masked divisions among Native activists about the goals of the movement. In addition, the fact that AIM and the IITC had not fully defined how these issues should interact with or fit within non-Native political frameworks, promoted debates at the turn of the 1980s about the role of AIM in relation to the political left. The chapter concludes by explaining how through various tribunals and writings, movement leaders such as Russell Means and Dennis Banks attempted to define how native issues compared to both socialism and the rising conservative movement embodied by the election of Ronald Reagan.

These intellectual debates shifted to real world events in the mid-1980s when AIM found itself divided over the conflict in Nicaragua between the Sandinistas and the Contras. The Sandinistas, the "darlings of the left" as Russell Means called them, were

early supporters of AIM, and the movement's leaders tended to side with the revolutionary cause in Central America. Yet, other Native activists found the Sandinistas to be as bad as their conservative counterparts in regards to indigenous rights and advocated for a third way that focused on indigenous autonomy.[43] While AIM had its share of in-fighting and conflict in the years following Wounded Knee, the movement remained largely cohesive during the period. The Nicaraguan conflict, however, fundamentally split the organization into competing factions.

The final chapter covers some of the debates that arose from the Nicaragua conflict in the 1990s. As AIM split into various chapters, each claiming true legitimacy and discounting all others, AIM's major leaders sought to expel each other from the organization for various alleged crimes against both the movement and Indian peoples. Whereas outside observers of AIM had long questioned the legitimacy of the Indian identities of its members, the 1990s saw the organization's members competing to define who was and was not an Indian. At the same time that Russell Means appeared on movie screens around the country, the "paper wars" of the 1990s convinced many observers that AIM had completely lost its way, demolished in large part by the egos of its founders.

Yet AIM continues, and the movement's goals remain unchanged. The conclusion brings the narrative up through the recent events opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline and the alliances with the Idle No More movement that began in Canada. While much of this story covers in-fighting and conflict, in many respects I see this as a more optimistic story than many may perceive it. AIM was never just the major figureheads that appeared

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[43] Russell Means and Marvin J Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 463.

in media on a regular basis. The movement meant something different to everyone who took part in it over the years, and it continues. As Clyde Bellecourt writes in the conclusion to his autobiography, "I have helped to create the conditions necessary for young people to develop leadership skills. The current generation has all sorts of advantages I never had, the greatest of which is access to their culture and ceremonies."[44]

[44] Bellecourt and Lurie, *The Thunder Before the Storm*, 315.

CHAPTER II

VIETNAM ON THE PLAINS: THE FAILED UNDERSTANDING OF THE OCCUPATION OF WOUNDED KNEE

"Wounded Knee"

There was a war All my people came
We held out The whole world watched
We won The drums beat on We're one…
- A brave 3/73[1]

As Stanley Lyman, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Superintendent for the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwest South Dakota, looked out his window on the morning of February 22, 1973, he could feel something was going to happen. Then he saw two little kids walking down the street, blissfully unaware of the events "going on in the adult world around them." As Lyman stood watching the kids merrily kick some beer cans down the road he could not help but say a prayer.[2] The rising tensions on the reservation seemed to be coming to a head with the pending impeachment trial of Oglala tribal chairman Richard "Dick" Wilson. Wilson, elected the year before, stood accused of misusing tribal funds and providing reservation jobs to family and friends. The impeachment proceedings against Wilson were the result of simmering tensions between

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[1] Quoted in "Wounded Knee: A Firsthand Review," *Minnesota Leader*, December 30, 1974. Roger Finzel American Indian Movement Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Box 1, Folder 8. This chapter is revised from my Master's thesis, "Conflicting Narratives: Wounded Knee, Vietnam, and the Question of Indian Identity" (Master's Thesis, University of Tulsa, 2012)

[2] Stanley David Lyman and Floyd A. O'Neil, *Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account*, Bison Books (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993), 1.

older traditional Indians and the younger mixed-bloods that went back well beyond Wilson's close electoral victory the year before. Indians of mixed ancestry tended to live close to the reservation's major center of Pine Ridge, while traditional, full-blood, Indians leaned towards living in small, remote communities. The few services available on the reservation—trading posts, tribal offices, and basic health care—were centered in Pine Ridge, forcing traditionalists to make long treks for essential services and jobs. Additionally, the rural communities also tended to suffer from a lack of political representation in the tribal government that was dominated by mixed-race Oglalas such as Dick Wilson.

Passed during the "Indian New Deal," the Indian Reorganization Act provided for increased self-government and ended the allotment of Indian land to individual landowners. The original bill proposed by Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier went farther than the final bill passed by Congress, prompting opposition to the bill by some Native Americans. Opponents argued that in place of the Indian agent who held "dictatorial" power, a new expanded bureaucracy—still under the control of the BIA—stepped in to enforce Washington policy and ignored traditional tribal ways.[3] On the other hand, supporters of the act pointed out the end of allotment, preserved Native communities, established Native corporations, and strengthened tribal governments at a time when many wanted them abolished.[4] Pine Ridge adopted an IRA constitution in

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[3] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants* (Rooseveltown, N.Y: Akwesasne notes, 1974), 9-10.

[4] E. Reeseman Fryer, "Implementing the IRA," in Kenneth R. Philp and Institute of the American West, eds., *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from*

1936, which created a tribal council and four executive officers: chairman; vice chairman; treasurer; and secretary. Dick Wilson first became involved in tribal government when he won election to the tribal council representing his hometown of Pine Ridge. In 1972 he ran against incumbent Gerald One Feather because, as his campaign manager said, he had the time and inclination.[5] One Feather drew criticism on the reservation for his slow response to the death of Raymond Yellow Thunder in the border town of Gordon, Nebraska, and regularly leaving the reservation. While Stanley Lyman believed Wilson never felt comfortable outside of the mixed-race communities, Wilson tried to capitalize on the apathy towards One Feather and regularly courted full-blood voters. Wilson hosted a variety of events including picnics and cookouts and made regular visits to people's homes. Additionally, Wilson grew his hair long and said he supported the American Indian Movement and their protests in response to the Yellow Thunder Killing a "110 percent."[6]

Wilson's campaign was smart to exploit the popularity of the American Indian Movement, as the group had secured one of its biggest successes earlier that year just over the border in Nebraska. In February of 1972, authorities in Gordon found the body of Raymond Yellow Thunder in his pick-up in a used car lot. Days before police discovered his body, two brothers, Leslie and Melvin Hare, along with two of their friends, found Yellow Thunder wandering the streets drunk. The group assaulted Yellow

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Roosevelt to Reagan (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1995), 87; Graham Holmes, ibid., 89-90.

[5] Akim D Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee*, 2009, 131.

[6] Ibid., 131-2.

Thunder, stripped him of his clothes, and drove him to an American Legion Hall, where they used the dazed and confused Indian as a public spectacle. The attack highlighted the issues many Lakota had with the various border towns around the reservation, arguing that towns such as Gordon, Rushville, and White Clay based most of their economies on exploiting reservation Indians. While the towns provided numerous services not available on the reservations (including alcohol sales), venturing into them also meant interacting with racists who regularly cheated, harassed, and assaulted Indians.[7] Whether it was the brutality of the incident or something else, Yellow Thunder's death was the final straw for many on the reservation, and they decided to do something about it. After failing to secure assistance from the tribe, the BIA, and other organizations, Yellow Thunder's family turned to AIM. After accepting the invitation, the group planned to fill Gordon with Indians from the reservation and close it down in protest. For three days, hundreds of Lakota filled the tiny town's streets, and scared most of the town's residents into hiding. Realizing the Indians were not going to leave without results, the district attorney arrested the men for manslaughter and false imprisonment, and the town fired a jailer accused of mistreating Indian inmates and agreed to set up a human rights commission to examine issues in the town.[8] Just as AIM succeeded, Wilson's support for the movement and embrace of traditional factions on the reservation secured him a close victory.

Wilson's first year in office played out far differently from his campaign promised. Shortly after his election Wilson cut his shoulder length hair and replaced it

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[7] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 13; Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, 1996, 112-3.

[8] Ibid., 116.

with a crew cut. Wilson's attempts to suppress his dissenters, like the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) and members of the American Indian Movement, only worsened tensions. Following AIM's takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington, D.C., in November of 1972, Wilson took out a restraining order against AIM leader Russell Means and supporter Severt Young Bear, both members of the tribe.[9] In addition, the tribal council passed a resolution that demanded, "The sovereign dignity of the Oglala Sioux tribe be upheld and protected against any threats…" arising from the American Indian Movement. The resolution also barred any "victory dancing" on the reservation in response to the BIA takeover.[10] Furthermore, Wilson formed his own personal militia, the Guardians of the Oglala Nation, nicknamed "GOONs" by their opponents, which carried out an open campaign to suppress dissent on the reservation.

In addition to reversing his support for AIM, which remains mostly unexplained, his opponents claimed the tribal monies that did not go towards creating the private police force to harass opponents got funneled into increasing his salary and paid off various friends and relatives.[11] Wilson also stood accused of circumventing the tribal council by using executive sessions and intimidating political opponents, a practice that would only get worse later in his tenure. For many on the reservation, Wilson was no better than the old Indian agents who stole and cheated the Indians under their "care," and they quickly began to lobby for his impeachment. At the same time, AIM responded to an

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[9] Restraining Order, November 15, 1972, Kent Frizzell Papers, University of Tulsa Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 3.

[10] Resolution Number 72-55, November 10, 1972, Ibid.

[11] For further allegations against Wilson see *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 14-20.

incident similar to the Yellow Thunder death after a white patron at a bar in Buffalo Gap killed Wesley Bad Heart Bull. Unlike Raymond Yellow Thunder, Bad Heart Bull had a lengthy criminal record and warrant for assault, and his death may have been forgotten as a simple bar fight if not for the increased anxieties and racial tensions throughout the region.[12] The case drew increased protests when the District Attorney charged Bad Heart Bull's assailant with manslaughter rather than murder. In response to what they perceived as a lack of justice, AIM organized a protest that quickly escalated into violence. While a small group of Indians met with the district attorney inside the Custer County courthouse, AIM members came to blows with police when they tried to force their way into the building. The police deployed tear gas, and AIM leader Dennis Banks jumped through a courthouse window to escape. When the riot was over, police had arrested twenty-two protesters, including Bad Heart Bull's mother, and the protesters had burned two police cars and the town's small chamber of commerce building.

The riot in Custer, along with an ongoing campaign to confront the rampant racism in Rapid City, South Dakota, led Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton to ask US Attorney General Richard Kleindienst to send US marshals to the Pine Ridge Reservation. Rogers was responding to the recent events and the "serious nature" of the threat AIM posed to the reservation.[13] With Wilson's impeachment scheduled for the coming week, everyone anticipated AIM would make some form of protest should the proceeding fail to remove Wilson from office. Dick Wilson, a brash man not afraid of a

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[12] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 183.

[13] Morton to Kleindienst, February 13, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

fight or two, openly threatened to cut off Russell Means's braids should he set foot on the reservation. Means, an Oglala Sioux born on Pine Ridge, had spent most of his life in California and Cleveland before joining AIM in the late 1960s. He threatened to run against Wilson in the next tribal election where he promised he would unseat the man he called a dictator, liar, and a drunk.[14] While Wilson was vocal in his opposition to AIM and Russell Means, most Oglalas opposed to Wilson hoped to resolve what were relatively local issues without involving outside help. However, after the impeachment proceedings, chaired by Wilson himself, failed, both sides prepared for the worst.

As Wilson and his supporters expected a response from AIM, his opponents feared the chairman would use the victory to continue his campaign of political suppression. OSCRO and traditional tribal elders convened a meeting on February 27 to decide a response to the failed impeachment attempt. More than 200 people attended and agreed that something needed to be done, but arrived at little consensus. While some suggested a takeover of the tribal offices in downtown Pine Ridge, the increased security by the US marshals and FBI meant any attempt to take the building could end in bloodshed. Instead, Frank Fools Crow, a traditional chief, spoke up and said, "Go ahead and do it, go to Wounded Knee." He said, "You can't get in the BIA office and the tribal office, so take your brothers from the American Indian Movement and go to Wounded Knee and make your stand there."[15] The occupation of Wounded Knee had officially begun. While the protestors sought to focus on the practices and corruption of Dick

[14] Smith and Warrior, 191.

[15] Ibid., 200.

Wilson, the intricacies of tribal politics escaped most of those who witnessed the subsequent seventy-one-day occupation. Instead most of those who watched on the nightly newscasts, read the copious amount of magazine and newspaper articles, and even many of those inside Wounded Knee itself came to see the occupation not as an Indian issue but as part of larger third-world struggles, and a stylistic parallel to Vietnam taking place not in the jungles of South Vietnam, but rather in the Indian Country of South Dakota.

Overview of the Occupation

The group of a few hundred AIM and OSCRO members set out from the small hall in which they were meeting and headed east towards Pine Ridge. As the caravan of cars approached town, the federal agents on guard at the tribal offices nervously began radioing to each other about the approaching cars. Clearly AIM had prepared for the stand everyone anticipated. Instead, the guards watched in confusion as the caravan drove straight through Pine Ridge without stopping.[16] Upon arriving in the village, many of the 200 occupiers went after the Wounded Knee Trading Post, one of the few buildings in town. Owned by the non-Native Gildersleeve family, the business had a history of complaints and was the site of an AIM protest the year before. Indians living in Wounded Knee asserted that the Gildersleeves engaged in a variety of exploitative business practices, opened mail in search of checks and money, and profited from the history of Wounded Knee by operating a museum and selling souvenirs to tourists.[17] The confused

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[16] Russell Means and Marvin J Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 258.

[17] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 118. It should be noted that while the Gildersleeves have received generally negative coverage in historical accounts, they had their

agents in Pine Ridge learned of the burglary at Wounded Knee, and FBI agent Joseph Trimbach ordered the erection of roadblocks around the town by 10:00 PM.[18]

AIM and OSCRO released a set of three demands to John Terronez, a field representative for the US Department of Justice's Community Relations Service, who was present during the initial takeover. According to Terronez, the activists wanted Senator William Fulbright to convene a hearing of the Senate's foreign relations committee to address treaty issues; a hearing by Senator Kennedy's subcommittee on Administrative Practices and Procedures to investigate the BIA and Department of Interior; and a Senate subcommittee on Indian Affairs investigation on the Sioux Reservations in South Dakota.[19] In addition, AIM gave the US government two options to end the conflict: they could either negotiate the demands or "wipe out the old people, women, children, and men, by shooting and attacking us."[20] These demands are an important point to emphasize. By opting for pan-Indian demands instead of explicitly calling for the removal of Dick Wilson from office, AIM effectively recast the purpose of Wounded Knee from a local issue into a national one.

News reports of the incident were almost as swift as the government's response. Accounts of "Indian Militants" seizing the town and holding "hostages" appeared in

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supporters on the reservation. Tim Giago, the founder of the Native American Journalists Association and a resident of Pine Ridge whose father worked for the family continues to be one of their most vocal supporters, writing regular op-eds arguing the Gildersleeves and the residents of the town were the victims rather than the villains of the occupation. See "Who Were the Real Victims of Wounded Knee 1973," *Huffington Post*, March 3, 2009. Accessed from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tim-giago/who-were-the-real-victims_b_170866.html

[18] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 34.

[19] Ibid., 34-35.

[20] Ibid., 35.

newspapers across the Midwest the following day. Carter Camp, a Ponca Indian from Oklahoma and an AIM leader, told the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* that the occupiers had the "men and the weapons to hold Wounded Knee." Camp went on to say the group had "high-powered" rifles and that the participants would "die if necessary."[21] Within days the incident made national news with reports of "hostages" in Wounded Knee. South Dakota's Senator James Abourezk promised to negotiate with Indians once they freed the hostages. Both Abourezk and George McGovern, South Dakota's other senator, flew to Wounded Knee on March 1 to seek the release of those Wounded Knee residents still inside the village. AIM claimed the eleven residents were free to come and go, but Means provided a list to Trimbach on the first day of the occupation that read "Hostages, Wounded Knee, South Dakota" and described the eleven as "prisoners of war."[22] In his autobiography, Means also states Father Paul Manhart had his hands bound following his discovery in the church's choir loft.[23] Nevertheless, the residents all told the senators they were not hostages, and some refused to leave the village. Following the meeting between AIM and the two senators, the *New York Times* reported that the "Indians at Wounded Knee Free 11 Held for 2 Days" and that the residents had been told they could go two hours before the meeting with the Senators.

Contrary to Camp's earlier claims about "high-powered rifles," the two senators only saw a small number of weapons in the village on their visit and added "they were

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[21] Miranda Jean Brady, "The Occupation of Wounded Knee: Press Coverage of the American Indian Movement" (M.S., San Jose State University, 2003), 44-45.

[22] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 206-7.

[23] Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 259.

not very much in evidence." The next day, however, Ralph Erickson, special assistant to the Attorney General, stated the Indians possessed an M-60 machine gun, adding, "We are not optimistic at the progress today."[24] Claims also surfaced that either the Indians mounted the weapon in the bell tower of the church or on a vehicle they drove around the village. With the reports of heavy weaponry in Wounded Knee, the Justice Department ordered heavier armaments closer to Wounded Knee in order to "match theirs."[25] The government stationed army-supplied Armored Personnel Carriers (APC)—tanks without mounted weapons—on the roads surrounding Wounded Knee. While the occupiers possessed one AK-47, a souvenir an Indian veteran brought back from Vietnam, most of the weapons inside the village were like the .22 caliber rifle with "a stock held together by tape" that *New York Times* journalist John Kifner saw on his March 4 visit to the village.[26] In contrast, government forces at Wounded Knee would ultimately utilize upwards of fifteen armored personnel carriers and would request 200 CS grenades, M-79 grenade launchers with 100 rounds, 600 rounds of CS gas and 600 rounds of red smoke, 750 pounds of dry CS and air delivery canisters along with helicopters and military advisors to support efforts to end the occupation.[27]

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[24] "Indians at Wounded Knee Free 11 Held for 2 Days," *New York Times*, March 2, 1973; "Federal Force Rings Wounded Knee; F.B.I. Car Hit," *New York Times*, March 3, 1973.

[25] "U.S. Reported Set to Bolster Reservation Arms," *New York Times*, March 3, 1973; Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 206.

[26] "Wounded Knee is Tiny Armed Camp," *New York Times*, March 5, 1973.

[27] "Counter-Insurgency Comes Home," *Counter-Spy* Fall 1974, 19-25. Finzel Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

The government, however, saw little threat from the small band of Indians. On March 4, the Directorate of Military Support (DOMS) noted in a report to DOMS head Major General Rollan Gleszer that the seizure of the isolated village posed no threat to the reservation, state of South Dakota, or the Nation at large. Furthermore, the report stated the occupants showed little sign of wishing to inflict serious harm on anyone in the village or the government forces surrounding it. Instead the report concluded the biggest issue with the takeover was that it was "a source of irritation if not embarrassment to the Administration in general and the Department of Justice in particular."[28] With the US government doing little to end the conflict, Dick Wilson offered up the first threat to end the occupation himself, declaring that he had an army of 800 to 900 men ready to enter the village. When questioned on the statements, Wilson said, "I will not be responsible for holding my people back" and even offered to join them with his own gun.[29] Ongoing negotiations between Erickson and Wounded Knee broke off on March 6, when Dennis Banks publicly burned Erickson's proposal. The following day Erickson called on the occupiers to send out the women and children by dark the next day and left South Dakota for Washington. The ominous statement seemed to be an ultimatum, and the occupiers prepared for a confrontation by donning red war paint and receiving blessings from a medicine man. After a day of high tensions inside Wounded Knee, darkness fell, and nothing happened. While many saw the statement as a demand, Erickson and other

[28] Ibid.

[29] Smith and Warrior, 215.

anonymous officials claimed that there was no implied threat and that the government did not plan to forcibly end the conflict.[30]

Following the tensions, the government removed some roadblocks surrounding Wounded Knee and hoped that this gesture would encourage people inside the village—both occupiers and the media—to leave. With media coverage and support dwindling, the government hoped the affair would lose steam and disappear. While some inside Wounded Knee acted as the government hoped, far more people flooded into the village. Meanwhile the occupiers declared the encampment the "Independent Oglala Nation," and, according to the *New York Times*, put themselves on "war footing" with the US government.[31] Over the course of the occupation, the Independent Oglala Nation would issue informal "passports," create a border patrol, and, according to one report, swear in 349 new citizens, half of whom were not Oglala Sioux.[32]

That same day six postal service inspectors tested those claims by trying to enter the village to check reports of mailbox tampering at the trading post. The groups quickly captured the inspectors and held them at gunpoint. Russell Means responded to the capture by saying any "spy" found in the village would be killed by firing squad. However, the group released the inspectors a few hours later after parading them in front

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[30] "U.S. Stands Firm in Indian Dispute," *New York Times*, March 9, 1973.

[31] "F.B.I. Agent Shot as Indians Warn U.S.," *New York Times*, March 12, 1973.

[32] According to *Veneceremos*, the total of 349 included 189 Oglalas, 160 Indians and Chicanos of other tribes, seven whites and three African Americans. "Wounded Knee 1973" Supplement to Veneceremos April 9, 1973, Robert E. Robideau American Indian Movement Papers, University of New Mexico. Center for Southwest Research, Box 9, Folder 21.

of news cameras.[33] All of the talk and an injury to an FBI agent later in the day prompted head US Marshal Wayne Coburn to reinstate the roadblocks and declare the government would be "more hard-nosed" about the affair.[34]

When the two parties resumed negotiations on March 13, Harlington Wood, an assistant attorney general for the Justice Department, replaced Erickson. Instead of meeting in a tipi situated in the "demilitarized zone" between the opposing sides, as Erickson had done, Wood requested to hold talks inside Wounded Knee. AIM granted the request, and a formal escort that included two horseback riders, Means, Camp, and Leonard Crow Dog (the spiritual leader of the movement) escorted Wood to the village, followed by a dozen "warriors."[35] The thirty-seven point proposal offered by Wood required the end of the occupation and the condition that all indicted individuals submit to arrest, but promised a later meeting with the Interior Department in Sioux Falls. Unfortunately, Interior Secretary Morton had destroyed any chance to end the conflict the previous weekend. He declared that the government would not "bow to threats by militant Indians," promised "nothing will be gained by promoting a national guilt complex" or by "blackmail," and dismissed the occupiers as "renegades," "youthful adventurers," and criminals following in the footsteps of the "black militant movement."[36] On the 18, following a firefight that injured a medic inside Wounded Knee,

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[33] Smith and Warrior, 218.

[34] Ibid., 219.

[35] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 112; Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 221.

[36] "Morton Insists U.S. Won't Yield," *New York Times*, March 11, 1973.

the head of Wounded Knee's security forces, Stanley Holder, publicly burned the proposal, decried it as "surrender," and stated the group refused to "be caged like animals."[37]

The following week saw increased firefights and a further tightening of the security perimeter. High-powered search lights, flares, and machine gun tracer bullets from the government forces lit the night sky at Wounded Knee over the next ten days. On March 25, the occupiers secured a victory against the roadblocks when Federal Judge Andrew Bogue ordered the government to allow six lawyers and carloads of food into Wounded Knee each day until the end of the month.[38] The order prompted Dick Wilson, increasingly marginalized during this period, to put out a new call for "fellow patriots" to sign up to defend the reservation from the "major Communist threat" AIM presented. The open call for support promised to make Wounded Knee "another Little Big Horn."[39] In addition to expressing ire at those inside Wounded Knee, Wilson argued the occupation only continued because the media wanted it to. Reflecting President Nixon's views of the media in Vietnam, one of Wilson's newsletters from late March noted, "No news reporter or TV cameraman has ever won a war, but they can destroy a nation by the propaganda of lies and hate that they broadcast for every crackpot, screwball, and Communist-front organization who wants to take a swat at our American way of life."[40] While the court order required the federal government to let lawyers and supplies through, Wilson's

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[37] "Indians Set Fire to U.S. Proposal," *New York Time*s, March 19, 1973.

[38] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 124.

[39] Newsletter, March 26, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.

[40] Newsletter, March 26, 1973, Finzel Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

vigilantes refused to comply, claiming it did not apply on the Sioux Reservation. In response, the group formed a roadblock outside of federal lines, the vigilantes turned back AIM's lawyers and supplies, and federal officials did nothing to remove the roadblock. Wilson's "Oglala Warriors" swore to "starve them out" and shot down the telephone lines leading into Wounded Knee, effectively cutting off communication to the village.[41]

The imposition of Wilson's roadblocks was not the most pressing issue the occupation faced. Following government orders, NBC, the last remaining broadcast news network inside the village, pulled out. A cameraman with the network described the situation as "pretty tense," and the *New York Times* followed up the statement with reports that Dennis Banks threatened to "shoot his way out of Wounded Knee if food were not made available." Banks, an Ojibwe Indian from the Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota, looked like a guy who was not joking. He regularly addressed the groups inside Wounded Knee with a headband and a gun strapped to his hip, an image the *Times* ran earlier in the month alongside Morton's comments about Wounded Knee. The situation intensified when a bullet paralyzed US Marshal Lloyd Grimm from the waist down. News reports claimed the shot came from an Indian bunker 500 yards from Grimm's, but questions remained about where the bullet came from.[42] In addition to the sporadic gunfire coming from Wounded Knee and the potential for crossfire from another

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[41] "U.S. Marshall Shot at Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, March 27, 1973.

[42] AIM members inside the village claimed no AIM bunkers were engaged in shooting at the time and AIM members in bunkers claimed the shot came from a federal bunker opposite where Grimm was stationed. Carol Talbert, "Wounded Knee: 1973," manuscript of notes. Carol Sullivan Wounded Knee Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Box 1, Folder 1.

government bunker, Wilson's vigilantes and white ranchers fired off rounds in the hopes of provoking a firefight and ending the occupation.[43] It was later revealed at the trials of Banks and Means that a member of the Ranchers' Protection Association, William Leavitt, had been planning to drop explosives on some of the demonstrators at Wounded Knee.[44] Another white resident sent a letter to Senator Abourezk arguing if the government continued "mollycoddling" and giving blackmail payments to AIM while not guaranteeing the safety and security of property, vigilante committees would be needed.[45]

Meanwhile the firefight at the village continued into the next day and approached "open warfare," and Kent Frizzell, now heading the government's negotiations, proclaimed, "The fun and games are over."[46] The news also included reports that Dennis Banks and Russell Means, de facto heads of the occupation, fled the town overnight. While the two left to meet with supporters on the neighboring Rosebud reservation and later returned, discord appeared to be growing inside Wounded Knee. The following day, reports appeared that a hundred Indians inside Wounded Knee wished to surrender but were being held at gunpoint by the "hard-core dissidents" headed by Means and Banks. Frizzell described the split, controlled by medicine man Leonard Crow Dog and OSCRO leader Pedro Bissonette, as a "Mexican standoff," with Banks and Means eventually

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[43] *Voices from Wounded Knee,* 129.

[44] Kim G. Rogal, "Bad Days on the Reservation," *The Nation*. Reprinted in American Friends Service Committee Newsletter (undated), Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 21.

[45] Letter from Harold D. Buckingham to Sens. McGovern and Abourezk, and Congressmen Abdnor and Denholm, March 21, 1973. Frizzell Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

[46] "Firing Stepped Up at Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, March 28, 1973.

taking full control.[47] Carol Sullivan (née Talbert), an anthropologist from Syracuse University who was inside Wounded Knee at the time reporting for the Syracuse *New Times,* argued the reports were false, and there was no divide within the camp.[48] Regardless of the level of dissent within the village, the split, along with government claims that a plane dropped a .50 caliber rifle and dynamite land mines into the village the previous day threatened to end any chance of peacefully ending the incident.

Negotiations began again on March 31, when Frizzell met with thirteen members of the Oglala Sioux Nation, two from AIM, four from the legal defense fund established to assist the movement, and Indian treaty expert Hank Adams, in a tipi in the "demilitarized zone" between the two sides.[49] With the negotiations ongoing, a Harris Poll on April 1 indicated 51% of Americans supported the occupation, with wide support for all of the Indians' demands. Highest levels of support were found among the young (under 30), college-educated, those living in middle-class east coast suburbs, African Americans, union members, and Catholics.[50]

The negotiations continued into the first week of April with little progress. Treaty rights, the removal of Dick Wilson from office, and the time and manner with which the occupiers would lay down their weapons and surrender continued to divide the sides. While the talks continued, small amounts of gunfire could be heard each night, but the reservation as a whole slipped back into a "sleepy routine." Government bunkers were

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[47] "Indians Said to Block Surrender by 100," *New York Times*, March 29, 1973.

[48] "Indians and the Media," Carol Sullivan Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

[49] *Voices from Wounded Knee*, 134.

[50] *Miami Herald* news article, April 2, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 2, Folder 2.

becoming increasingly "homey and elaborate," equipped with stoves, fireplaces, and sleeping quarters. Wilson's vigilantes, equally bored, spent most of their time playing horseshoes and firing off random gunshots.[51] While the tribal roadblock was in a legal gray area, it received support from superintendent Lyman, who "stole" cases of C-rations to supply the roadblock.[52] Lyman, a staunch supporter of Wilson, felt that the whole affair would have been over the night it began had the BIA police and Wilson's vigilantes been allowed into the village to deal with the trouble themselves.

By April 5, it looked as if Kent Frizzell had accomplished what none of the other government officials could, bring an end to the siege. Frizzell, the Assistant Attorney General, Land and Natural Resources division, and nominee for the Interior Department's Solicitor General, accepted almost all of the occupiers' demands, most significantly a meeting with the White House. The agreement won Frizzell wide praise, including his hometown newspaper, *Hutchinson News* (Kan.), which suggested that Frizzell keep his saddlebags packed, as Cambodia could be next, but it found little support in parts of the Midwest.[53] The Omaha *World Herald* decried the "dilly-dallying" by the US government that had the possibility to "encourage militant Indians to make land grabs at numerous scattered locations." The editorial followed news reports that Indians seized land near Onawa, Iowa, in a protest similar to Wounded Knee. A federal memo from March 27 also expressed a fear of potential Wounded Knee-style takeovers in Oklahoma and Tennessee

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[51] "Wounded Knee is Slipping Back into a Sleepy Routine," *New York Times*, April 2, 1973.

[52] Lyman and O'Neil, *Wounded Knee 1973*, 32.

[53] "Intercepted Letter," *Hutchinson News*, April 8, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 2, Folder 9.

by "militant Choctaw-Chickashas" and "activist Cherokees."[54] Unless the government took a hard line against the occupation, the paper wrote, "Tedious times are in prospect."[55]

Yet, the possibility of a widespread takeover movement seemed fractured by conflicts within Indian Country over the effectiveness of AIM's protest. For instance, in Washington state, which had seen some of the first direct action Indigenous rights protests in response to the state's restriction on treaty fishing rights, one Puyallup activist noted in late May that area Indians planned to "secure the Cascadia Juvenile Reception Diagnostic Center" but told a newspaper the event was a local matter trying to resolve "local needs and objectives" rather than a project of the American Indian Movement.[56] As a result, even before the end of the highest profile event in AIM's history, the organization was already deeply divisive within Indian Country, and Wounded Knee itself was being misunderstood by those who should have been most supportive of the event.

With the agreement signed, Means led a delegation out of Wounded Knee to meet with the Nixon Administration in Washington, DC. The group made a stop in Rapid City, where, as agreed, federal agents formally arrested Means under a grand jury indictment from the previous month. After being processed and posting bond, the group departed for

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[54] Federal memo, March 27, 1973. Frizzell Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.

[55] "From Wounded Knee to Onawa and…?," Omaha *World Herald*, April 7, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Folder 2, Box 8.

[56] "Indian Confirms Takeover Plans; Timing Left Hazy," May 25, 1973. Untitled newspaper article in Hank Adams papers; 1958-1978, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 1, Folder 3.

Washington, D.C., the following day. Upon arrival, it quickly became clear that the White House would not open negotiations. The White House believed the agreement called for the occupiers to surrender their weapons before the meeting, while Means claimed surrender would only happen once the meeting had begun.[57] The administration refused to move on the issue and, in an impromptu news conference, Means claimed the government "flat out lied to us."[58] Dennis Banks, still in Wounded Knee, refused to surrender arms claiming the government "violated every paragraph in the agreement."[59] The talks remained at an impasse until they formally ended on the 11th with the government's decision to cancel the meeting in Washington.[60]

The ceasefire continued for another week before the conflict again descended into all out warfare. April 17 opened with an airdrop of provisions by three small, single-engine planes. Supplied by the anti-war movement, which had begun to view support for the occupation as part of the movement's larger aims, the packages contained food, but government forces claimed to observe long cylindrical cases believed to hold rifles.[61] A FBI helicopter responded to the drops by shooting at group of residents collecting the packages, prompting Wounded Knee's security forces to sporadically return fire. While the helicopter retreated, the government bunkers around Wounded Knee commenced a

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[57] "Violence Feared at Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, April 7, 1973.

[58] Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 288; "Militant Indians Are Reported Rejecting Agreement Made by 4 of Their Leaders," *New York Times*, April 9, 1973.

[59] "Militant Indians Are Reported Rejecting Agreement Made by 4 of Their Leaders," *New York Times*, April 9, 1973.

[60] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 152.

[61] Ibid., 176; Lyman and O'Neil, *Wounded Knee 1973*, 91; "Roadblock Run by Indian Women," *New York Times*, April 19, 1973.

sustained assault on the village. Frank Clearwater, an Indian from North Carolina who had been in the encampment less than a day, got shot twice in the head just as he awoke. The bullets knocked Clearwater unconscious almost instantly, and he never regained consciousness. He remained in the village for forty-five minutes due to continued gunfire from government forces. Eventually, medics moved him the half-mile to the medical tent but had to wait another hour for a helicopter to take him to a hospital in Rapid City, where he died on April 25.

With the increased hostilities, Assistant Attorney General Stanley Pottinger, the lead negotiator following Frizzell's failed April 5 agreement, stated that the government hoped to end the conflict peacefully but left a "forceful taking" of the village on the table.[62] Two days later George McGovern's staff released a letter the senator sent to Attorney General Kleindienst asking for the village to be cleared before "angry private citizens" did it themselves. McGovern went on to write that "time is running out on the containment policy followed by the Justice Department."[63] Shortly afterward, as Pottinger prepared to return to Washington, the *New York Times* stated he compared the deteriorating situation at Wounded Knee to Vietnam and quoted him saying the government could not pull out because "there would be a blood bath among the Indians." Francis Randall, an Oglala tribal leader, threatened to drive all the "Chicanos, Negroes,

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[62] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 176; Lyman and O'Neil, *Wounded Knee 1973*, 91; "Roadblock Run by Indian Women," *New York Times*, April 19, 1973.

[63] "McGovern Asks Federal Action," *New York Times*, April 22, 1973.

Russians, and Cherokees," off the reservation in two weeks unless the US government ended the occupation.[64]

Coincidentally, government plans to retake the village leaked to the press around the same time. The plans called for helicopters to drop warning pamphlets notifying the village of the impending assault. When the time came, the helicopter would disperse the large quantities of tear gas the Department of Justice had requested over the area and marshals would storm the village.[65] On April 23rd the US government momentarily shifted its focus from the occupiers inside Wounded Knee to Wilson's ongoing roadblock after Wilson's vigilantes prevented members of the Justice Department's Community Relations Service from entering Wounded Knee. Head US Marshal Wayne Colburn ordered the roadblock destroyed and the vigilantes stationed at it arrested. The government actions only infuriated Wilson more, and he threatened bloodshed should the government continue to prevent the re-establishment of the tribal roadblock.[66] Wishing to avoid a confrontation between the government and another group of Indians, the FBI set up a new roadblock on the site and quietly invited Wilson's men to help staff it.[67]

While the official end to the occupation of Wounded Knee would not come until the 8 of May, the twenty-four-hour period between April 26 and 27 signaled the end for most of those involved. Not only had Frank Clearwater passed away the day before, but

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 254.

[66] "Deteriorating Situation at Wounded Knee is Described as 'Brother Against Brother, Sister Against Sister'," *New York Times*, April 23, 1973; "Oglala Sioux Told by Leader to Arm," *New York Times*, April 24, 1973; Lyman and O'Neil, *Wounded Knee 1973*, 109.

[67] Lyman and O'Neil, 111.

the two days also witnessed the most intense firefight of the occupation and another fatality. With a limited supply of ammunition, the occupiers of Wounded Knee attempted to honor the latest ceasefire. Unfortunately, with outside vigilantes trying to instigate a firefight and the growing tension among government forces, any attempts to prevent shooting were bound to fail. At 11:00 PM on the 26, an unexpected countdown commenced over the government radios followed by close to fifty aerial flares lighting up the night sky.[68] Gunfire from the government bunkers followed, and the small supply of ammunition in Wounded Knee left the occupiers with little to do but hope the rain of bullets would eventually stop. By the time shooting had ceased at noon the next day, 20,000 rounds had poured into the village, one of which killed Buddy Lamont instantly.[69] The Vietnam veteran and Oglala Sioux tribal member's death all but sealed the fate of the occupation. Following the firefight, the village had no power, telephone or running water, and food supplies were almost exhausted.[70] Additionally, they suffered from a leadership vacuum. Russell Means never returned to Wounded Knee following his trip to Washington; instead he opted to conduct a cross-country speaking tour. While speaking in Los Angeles, federal agents arrested Means for violating his parole, supposedly for refusing to take back a statement about the "military taking over western South Dakota" earlier in the trip.[71] Authorities also arrested OSCRO head Pedro Bissonette around the same time in Rapid City.

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[68] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 208-10.

[69] Ibid., 211, 220.

[70] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 257.

[71] Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 289.

While the government stocked up on supplies in preparation for a potential assault on the village, AIM and the remaining occupiers turned their attention to Frank Clearwater's burial.[72] Morningstar Clearwater, Frank's wife, requested the burial be inside Wounded Knee, but Wilson and his supporters on the tribal council rejected the request. Instead, the council passed a resolution that barred the funeral from occurring on tribal lands and secured support from the FBI and US marshals to enforce the law.[73] Following a wake on Pine Ridge, the group buried Clearwater on Crow Dog's property on the neighboring Rosebud Reservation.

Negotiations between the sides resumed on May 1, this time in two old school buses situated outside the town. This left Frizzell, who had returned to conduct the new round of negotiations, in a tough spot. The Oglala appointed to represent Wounded Knee continued to demand a meeting with White House officials. This proved complicated following Nixon's Watergate address the previous night. Wounded Knee had largely disappeared from the national news by this point, and with Watergate threatening the Presidency, the administration had little time to deal with the occupation. Following two more days of negotiations, the White House sent a proposal that promised to hold a meeting on treaty rights at Pine Ridge in two weeks and look into the complaints against Dick Wilson.

The proposal was short on specifics and would have been rejected earlier in the occupation, but with little negotiating power left, those inside Wounded Knee accepted.

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[72] "Dispute Over Indian Burial Worsens at Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, April 29, 1973.

[73] "Movement Defies Sioux on Burial," *New York Times*, April 29, 1973.

With a new agreement in place only two issues remained—the surrender of arms and the burial of Buddy Lamont. Like Clearwater, the occupiers requested to bury Lamont inside Wounded Knee. Unlike Clearwater, Lamont's Oglala citizenship prevented Dick Wilson from stopping the burial. While Wilson's council attempted to restrict the funeral to eight or ten close family members, nearly one hundred people attended the funeral on May 6.[74] That night the two sides agreed to formally end the occupation on May 8.[75] The end could not come soon enough for all involved. The marshals left on guard in the bunkers openly complained about being unable to do their jobs and enforce the law.

Inside Wounded Knee, Dennis Banks and Carter Camp were the only remaining leaders, neither of whom would be present on the 8. Camp and Leonard Crow Dog surrendered a day early, and Banks escaped the night before the occupation's end.[76] The occupation concluded when the federal government lowered the AIM flag and raised the American flag. Additionally, the agents fired off assault rifles, and used the few remaining Indians as makeshift mine detectors.[77] The government managed to find only fifteen old and broken weapons inside the village. While Banks and others who left under the cover of darkness took some weapons with them, the weapons the government found were a good representation of the Wounded Knee arsenal. Nevertheless, Richard

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[74] "Government Lifts Wounded Knee News Blackout," *New York Times*, May 4, 1973; Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 262.

[75] "Tired Men Wait in Wounded Knee Bunkers," *New York Times*, May 8, 1973.

[76] Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 207.

[77] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 264.

Hellstern, assistant attorney general in the Justice Department, called the collection "a lot of crap" and argued the group violated the arms dispossession agreement.[78]

Much like the beginning, Wounded Knee ended with little fanfare outside the immediate village. News networks returned to cover the ending but were kept away from the village. The proposed meeting between the White House and the Oglalas took place on the 17, but the meeting was little more than a "symbolic solution for a symbolic occupation," according to White House aide Brad Patterson.[79] Following the end of the occupation, little remained of Wounded Knee besides the foundation of the church and a few odd buildings, but the area continued to draw tourists in the months that followed.[80] While Wounded Knee was supposed to be a protest on corruption in tribal government and potentially provided an opportunity to reassess tribal governments, Wounded Knee largely ended up being covered from two competing narratives derived from the Vietnam War. The first viewed the occupation and Vietnam as necessities to drive out illegal factions and reassert law and order. The second viewed the occupiers as partners with oppressed peoples engaged in solidarity struggles across the Third World and Vietnam in particular.

"Not just now, Mr. Wayne…perhaps later…"

Vietnam and Wounded Knee were thousands of miles apart, but for many people, most importantly those inside the hamlet, the two affairs had striking similarities. At the

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[78] "Occupation of Wounded Knee is Ended," *New York Times*, May 9, 1973.

[79] Smith, 266.

[80] "Wounded Knee After Long Siege: Some Ruins, Hundreds of Tourists Daily," *New York Times*, August 9, 1973.

same time soldiers in Vietnam attempted to frame their service in reference to the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century, observers of Wounded Knee drew parallels with the ongoing war. Put simply, while soldiers attempted to recreate the Old West in Southeast Asia, Vietnam appeared in South Dakota. While the government's overwhelming firepower made it easy for the occupiers to compare themselves to the national liberation movement in Vietnam, outside observers invoked the war to describe the incident while making political points about government failures in Vietnam.

Of all Hollywood actors, no one is more synonymous with the western genre than John Wayne. While Wayne appeared in non-westerns, a majority of his 172 films were westerns.[81] A well-known Republican and anti-Communist who famously rode an armored personnel carrier through an anti-war protest at Harvard, Wayne starred in, and co-directed, the only major pro-Vietnam War movie, 1968's *The Green Berets*.[82] Although *The Green Berets* attempted to justify the war in Vietnam, it was really a western movie set in Southeast Asia. The film changed the classic cowboys and Indians theme that made Wayne famous into a battle between US Marines and the National Liberation Front.[83] *The Green Berets'* mixture of the western and war movie seemed an appropriate mixture for the moment. As John Wayne fought for democracy on screen, American soldiers made regular patrols into "Indian Country," a term they used to

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[81] Statistics from the *Internet Movie Database*, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000078/. Accessed March, 12, 2012.

[82] "John Wayne Plays a New Role: The Invader of Harvard Square," *New York Times*, January 16, 1974.

[83] The National Liberation Front (NLF) was the official name for what most Americans commonly refer to as the Viet Cong.

describe any area in Vietnam outside of American control. A battalion commander later described part of an operation as an "old John Wayne Indian" movie, adding, "We were in a circle; they kept charging; they just kept getting killed."[84] General Maxwell Taylor also invoked the old narratives when he testified before Congress and stated America's pacification attempts failed because "it is very hard to plant the corn outside the stockade when the Indians are still around."[85] Soldiers serving in Vietnam regularly invoked the memory of Colonel George Armstrong Custer, the "boy general," to "imagine themselves caught in a hostile racial space, to embody his supposed heroism in that space, and to avenge his death." One Saigon latrine included a message that read, "We'll bring peace to this land if we have to kill them all — General Custer."[86] While Native Americans served in Vietnam in greater numbers per capita than any other group, the use of "Indian Country" to describe enemy territory directly connected Indians with the NLF.[87]

In the real Indian Country of Pine Ridge, Americans witnessed a "modern-day Indian uprising" that some argued could only happen with communist support, implicitly

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[84] Chester J. Pach, Jr., "TV News, The Johnson Administration, and Vietnam," in Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945 - 1990*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1992), 453.

[85] United States Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Vietnam Hearings* (New York: Random House, 1966), 182-3.

[86] Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 245.

[87] Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 9-10; Stephen W. Silliman, "The "Old West" in the Middle East: U.S. Military Metaphors in Real and Imagined Indian Country," *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 2 (2008), 239.

linking domestic events with the war in Southeast Asia and the wider Cold War.[88] The use of the historical references to the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century not only framed Vietnam in a racial context, for many it spoke to the inevitability of the war's conclusion. Yet, no matter how much work the US seemed to do in Vietnam, there always seemed to be another outbreak of violence. As historian Philip Deloria explains, terms like "uprising" and its companion, "outbreak," described "armed resistance, a rebellion that would never produce renewed autonomy, a pocket of stubbornness in the midst of the sweep of American empire."[89] In 1973, outbreak and uprising could represent Vietnam, South Dakota, or both. Like the war in Vietnam, the occupation of Wounded Knee played out in the homes of millions of Americans as they sat down to watch the evening news or read the newspaper.

Previous Native rights protests gave Americans some idea about the growing movement, but none took place in what people traditionally defined as "Indian Country." Wounded Knee not only took place on Pine Ridge, real Indian Country, but the starkness of the landscape reflected Hollywood's imagined Indian Country. Unlike Hollywood, Wounded Knee was very much a real event with live ammunition and deaths. Yet, in covering the event, many news outlets emphasized its sensationalistic aspects. In order to sell newspapers or attract viewers, reporters and photographers covering the protest turned to familiar imagery, either the detribalized and stoic Hollywood Indian or the ongoing war in Vietnam, both of which embraced ideas that involved the "other,"

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[88] "Behind a Modern-Day Indian Uprising," *US News & World Report*, March 12, 1973; *New York Times*, March 2, 1973.

[89] Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, (Lawrence, KS: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2004), 21.

whether the Vietnamese or the Indian as an impediment to the national spread of democratic ideals.

While Wounded Knee was extensively documented on television and in photographs, at least during the first half of the incident, these only tell half the story. As visual historian Dona Schwartz argues, the camera does not take the picture, the photographer does.[90] The photographer taking the picture makes a variety of decisions and composition choices that affect what the camera saw before taking the photograph. In many incidences these choices seek to capture a photograph or video that will attract attention. At the same time that cameramen or photojournalists may seek out eye catching and sensational imagery, that also many times, both by choice and unwittingly, mirror historical imagery and ideas. In this sense, "history takes on the character of spectacle. But this pictorial spectacle is a kind of rerun, since it depends on prior spectacles for its supposedly 'raw' material."[91] Historian Martha Sandweiss highlights these sentiments, writing that understanding photographs depends on the "viewer's understanding, an intellectual or visceral empathy shaped through culture, through experience, through the memory of other images."[92] Thus, the photographs of any event, including Wounded Knee, can have far different meanings for many different people and generations.

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[90] Dona Schwartz, "Objective Representation: Photographs as Facts," in Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography*, The History of Communication (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 158-9.

[91] Ibid., 150.

[92] Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 10.

For many people who experienced Wounded Knee either in person or through news reports, the event seemed to have obvious parallels with the war in Vietnam. *Time* magazine and other weekly news magazines regularly compared the two events, writing that Wounded Knee had "too many studied parallels to the Viet Nam War, including a 'demilitarized zone' and 'cease-fire observers.'"[93] Iona Andronov, a reporter for the Soviet-backed *New Times*, wrote that her experiences inside Wounded Knee reminded her of Southeast Asia, only "this time the trench…was thousands of miles away from Indo-China."[94] The newspaper of the radical Chicano movement *Veneceremos* noted in a supplement covering Wounded Knee that the smuggling of goods into the village at night had been nicknamed the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Pine Ridge's version of the Cambodian smuggling route used to link North and South Vietnam.[95] The occupation was, as *US News and World Report* labeled it, an "internal Indian affair," but as Ken Tilsen (an attorney representing the protesters) argued, it involved a corrupt government of "natives" who gained the support of the United States and used the resources to repress their fellow citizens in the interests of the United States. Tilsen concluded, "The best analogy to Pine Ridge is South Viet Nam."[96]

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[93] "A Suspenseful Showing of Red Power," *Time*, March 19, 1973.

[94] Iona Andronov, "Another American Tragedy," *New Times,* May 1973, 20.

[95] "Wounded Knee 1973" Supplement to *Veneceremos* April 9, 1973, Robert Robideau American Indian Movement Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, Box 1, Folder 8.

[96] "Behind a Modern-Day Indian Uprising," *US News & World Report*, March 12, 1973; *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 128-9.

The U.S. government argued the actions in Vietnam were necessary to prevent Communist North Vietnam from overtaking South Vietnam and undermining the government's containment strategy. Many, however, questioned the relevance of being involved in Vietnam for American foreign policy and security. This skepticism is highlighted in a scene at the beginning of Wayne's *The Green Berets* where a reporter questions a marine about why we are fighting in South Vietnam. After some prodding the sergeant expands to include atrocities in Vietnam including the extermination of civilian leadership, the murder and torture of innocent women and children. Yet, one of the reporters responds, why are we fighting for this government, one that has not had a free election and does not have a constitution? The sergeant in charge responds that the American government did not form a constitution instantly, but developed one only after thirteen years of fighting and work. The response receives a round of applause and the reporter, sensing defeat, tensely responds that many people feel the war is simply between the Vietnamese people, adding "it's their war let them handle it." In response, the sergeant grabs guns from Russia and China and ammunition from Czechoslovakia, all supposedly found in Vietnam, and dumps them on the table in front of the reporters. According to the sergeant, the weapons are a clear sign that "what's involved here is Communist domination of the world," which again earns wide applause from the military families.

The rationale, however, fell flat both in the movie and real life, and by August of 1968, a majority of Americans viewed the Vietnam War as a mistake.[97] Americans raised

[97] "Most in Poll Term Vietnam a Mistake," *New York Times*, June 28, 1970.

similar questions about why the federal government became involved in the intra-tribal affair at Wounded Knee. Why were these men in the middle of Pine Ridge, if the conflict was nothing more than "a power struggle between two competing Indian factions?"[98] What did the government get for the millions of dollars it spent during the standoff?[99] For the most part the money bought weaponry and paid government agents to staff the series of bunkers that surrounded the village. One photograph taken in a government bunker includes four US Marshals looking out over Wounded Knee. Surrounding the men are multiple weapons including at least one M-16 and a double-barreled shotgun. The bunker looks to be little more than a barren patch of ground with a few hay bales and a cut down tree. In contrast to this photograph is another that appeared in the *New York Times* Unlike the previous photograph, the *New York Times* one has a relaxed air to it with a marshal relaxing in a bunker that included a stove. While the U.S. marshals slept in motels in Rapid City or other neighboring towns when off-duty, the *New York Times* claimed the government's bunkers were "elaborate and homey" and provided variety necessities and small amenities for the agents on duty.[100]

"Why the men are at Wounded Knee" neatly mirrors the government's reasons for being in Vietnam. In addition to the Indians occupying a town and supposedly holding people hostage, the government alleged the group had a hefty arsenal at their disposal. Claims of automatic weapons, some claiming the group put a machine gun in the church

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[98] "Raid at Wounded Knee," *Time*, March 12, 1973.

[99] "The Siege Nobody Won," *New York Times*, April 8, 1973. According to the article, the occupation cost over $2.5 million by April alone.

[100] "Wounded Knee Is Slipping Back into a Sleepy Routine," *New York Times*, April 2, 1973.

steeple, others claiming they mounted it on a vehicle, sparked fear that the movement had serious backing, potentially even coming from foreign governments. A waitress in Gordon, Nebraska, a Pine Ridge border town, stated a truck driver with military experience went to Wounded Knee and heard machine gun fire, adding "you can't buy machine guns in this country, so that just goes to prove they're coming from Russia."[101] The anti-communist John Birch Society used the lone AK-47 in the village and Dennis Banks's statement that AIM "greatly prized" support from Moscow as proof of communist involvement.[102] Dick Wilson, an ardent anti-Communist who showed John Birch Society films at tribal council meetings, responded that Wounded Knee was "beachhead" in a "major Communist thrust" into the reservation and the country.[103] Carol Sullivan, the Syracuse anthropologist, notes that a formal John Birch Society pamphlet entitled "Renegade" was distributed around the reservation, undoubtedly with support of some kind from Dick Wilson.[104] As historian Marilyn B. Young writes, one of the axioms of Cold War America was that Communism was always "indifferent to human life, individual values, ordinary moral scruples" and worked to completely subvert "the machinery of government and structure of society in the countries of the non-Soviet

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[101] "Indians at Wounded Knee Free 11 Held for 2 Days," *New York Times*, March 2, 1973.

[102] L.M. Huck, "Renegades: The Second Battle of Wounded Knee," *American Opinion*, May 1973, 3, 7.

[103] Oglala Newsletter, March 26, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.

[104] "The Indians and the Media," Carol Sullivan Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

world…."[105] Under this narrative Wounded Knee was more than a small group of Indians occupying a remote reservation town, it was part of the larger Cold War.

Additionally, Jesse Helms, the conservative Senator from North Carolina, argued on the Senate floor that tribal sovereignty and "retrocession of U.S. citizenship" would be a step backward from which the Indians would never emerge into the modern world."[106] Wilson made similar statements, arguing that the occupiers hoped to return the reservation to the old system, before the Indian Reorganization Act of the 1930s allowed the reservation to rule itself. While many traditionalists on Pine Ridge disliked the IRA and argued it fostered paternalism over self-rule, Wilson contended AIM wished to go back to the system in which the BIA representative dictated every action that happened on the reservation.[107] Much as the Hollywood Indian stood as a physical impediment to democracy and western expansion, AIM and their demands for tribal sovereignty were written off as backward steps for Native Americans. In response, the government employed a wait and see strategy, hoping the occupiers would lose support or run out of supplies and to surrender on their own. While U.S. marshals, FBI agents, and some BIA police appeared to coordinate the government's response, US Army "observers" took command as a test of a secret government civil disturbance plan developed in 1968.[108] Colonel Volney Warner, chief of staff for the 82nd Airborne, and Colonel Jack C. Potter,

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[105] Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945 - 1990*, 27-8.

[106] U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record.* 93rd Cong., 1st. sess., 1973. Vol 119, pt. 8.

[107] U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record.* 93rd Cong., 1st. sess., 1973. Vol 119, pt. 9.

[108] "Army Tested Secret Civil Disturbance Plan at Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, December 2, 1975.

deputy Chief of Staff for logistics of the Sixth Army, jointly directed the implementation of the strategy, codenamed "Garden Plot," at Wounded Knee. As the army secretly carried out the plan, the military attempted to downplay their involvement by having the two commanders wear civilian clothes and covered up some army marking on supplies they provided the federal agents.[109] Furthermore, the FBI and U.S. marshals pushed the military to provide 2,000 regulars to end the occupation, but the commanders rejected the plan. Already suffering from the Vietnam War, the army did not wish to create "martyrs" in a conflict they called an irritation and embarrassment for the Nixon Administration but not a threat to the nation.[110] Even though the army did not think much of the affair, it provided an abundant amount of support for it. In addition to necessities such as blankets and C-Rations, the army supplied fifteen Armed Personnel Carriers (APCs), 100,000 rounds of M-16 ammunition, 1,100 flares, and twenty sniper rifles. Additionally, a reconnaissance plane recently back from Vietnam and in possession of the Nebraska National Guard flew one mission over the village.[111] When the plane made its one flight over the village, the occupiers feared they were either being bombed or napalmed.[112]

As the tracer rounds and flares lit up the night sky over Wounded Knee, the APCs patrolled the boundary looking for anyone attempting to sneak in or out of the village.

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[109] Ibid.; Paul J Scheips and Center of Military History, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1945-1992* (Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, U.S. Army U.S. G.P.O., 2005), 437.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Stanley Nelson, *We Shall Remain: America Through Indian Eyes,* DVD, Disc 3, "Wounded Knee." (Alexandria Virginia: PBS Home Video, 2009).

The large vehicles, essentially tanks without mounted weapons, used regularly in the Vietnam War. In Vietnam one APC model, the M-113, initially demoralized the American opposition. Equipped with heavy armor and a .50 caliber machine gun that could penetrate nearly anything, the M-113s posed a serious problem for the NLF as they had no weapons to penetrate or stop the machines.[113] Japanese photographer Kyoichi Sawada famously captured an M-113 dragging the body of an NLF fighter for burial in a 1966 photograph that won the World Press Photo of the Year. At Wounded Knee, one set of U.S. marshals decorated their APC with a macabre hood ornament that spoke to the sordid history of the APCs in Vietnam. Captured just over a month into the occupation, the marshals affixed a cow skull to the front of the APC that read simply "death machine."

Luckily for the occupants of Wounded Knee, the APC never lived up to its reputation, and very few caused much damage, although one APC drove over and destroyed an AIM bunker.[114] Instead, the profuse amounts of government machine gun rounds presented the serious threat to the village. During the night of April 26 and 27, the government shot thousands of rounds into the village. While primarily directed at AIM's bunkers, ricochets and the tendency of the marshals to shoot at anything that moved placed the village under a regular hail of gunfire. AIM's bunkers could withstand a good amount of the gunfire thanks to improvements made by occupiers with Special Forces

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[113] Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945 - 1990*, 87.

[114] "Wounded Knee is a Tiny Armed Camp," *New York Times*, March 5, 1973.

training, but the village's buildings had much thinner walls that the bullets easily pierced.[115]

The decision to wait out the occupation instead of overrunning the village sparked criticism by some, who felt the policy not only encouraged the occupiers to keep up the protest, but to also start others across the country. Conservatives, following a decade of protests by various groups, wanted the containment strategy to end and wanted to see the government's APCs move in and clear the town out. The *National Review* argued that the "soft-headed approach" would do little besides guarantee "future violence and insurrection." The magazine went on to decry Nixon for being vocal on law and order, but only carrying "a very small stick" in response to Wounded Knee.[116] In another editorial, the magazine demanded the government "end the clowning around on both sides" and "re-establish control over the 'occupied' territory at Wounded Knee."[117] Bob Wiedrich, a columnist for the *Chicago Tribune,* devoted multiple columns to criticizing the government policy. Wiedrich claimed "Radical Whites that could care less about the tragic lot of many…Oglala…" exploited the occupation because they needed a new cause with the end of the war in Vietnam. Wiedrich further claimed the radicals inside Wounded Knee "played on the ancient religious beliefs…by suggesting medicine

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[115] Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 138.

[116] "Wounded Knee Fiasco," *National Review*, March 30, 1973.

[117] "Clean Up Wounded Knee," *National Review*, April 13, 1973.

bags…will protect the militants from bullets," a deliberate reference to the 1890 ghost dancers who believed their shirts protected them from bullets.[118]

The village did in fact feature numerous non-Natives, many of whom got into the village when the government initially lifted the roadblocks. The occupation hesitantly welcomed the new supporters—comprised of white leftists from the counterculture and anti-war movements, as well as a smattering of blacks, Chicanos, and other minorities—but made it known it would throw out anyone who did not pull their own weight.[119] Nevertheless, the presence of non-Natives inside the village continued to undermine occupiers' claims about their Indianness. When Frank Clearwater died, a government spokesperson told the Associated Press, "we tend to believe he is a white man and not an Indian." The report also quotes the spokesperson as saying Clearwater previously represented himself as a white man named Frank Clear.[120] Regardless of Clearwater's Indian background (or lack thereof), the use of radical non-Natives called into question the authenticity of the Natives demands and their competence to command a protest. Hank Adams, the important treaty expert who helped negotiate the settlement testified before Congress during the occupation that a large segment of the non-native support came from people "who have failed, to 'get in on'; and become credibly joined in a 'Third World' or 'American revolution'" and "formed a frontline of support for any Indians who will operate as their surrogate 'revolutionaries'." These individuals tended to

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[118] "Indians Exploited by Radical Whites," *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 2, Folder 12.

[119] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 226.

[120] Untitled AP Report, April 25, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 3, Folder 4. Clearwater's background is disputed. Sources list him as being either Cherokee or Apache.

undermine attempts at a peaceful resolution because they continued to seek confrontation, for whatever reason, other peaceful settlements.[121]

Public support for increased government actions, however, proved relatively small. Of the numerous letters and telegrams Kent Frizzell received, less than five demanded a quick conclusion to the occupation. B.A. Christie, a resident of South Dakota, wrote Kent Frizzell one of the few telegrams supporting increased government action at Wounded Knee. Writing at the end of March, Christie asked, "How could we beat Vietnam away over there when a local situation like Wounded Knee by a half dozen SOBs can't be taken care of?"[122] Ohio Judge Kenneth Sater called Frizzell "more futile than Kissinger" and demanded the government provide Wounded Knee an ultimatum, "24 hours to surrender, lock, stock, and barrel, or else…"[123] *Time* magazine published two letters to the editor that took a critical view of the government's policy and invoked historical imagery. Peter Peel, from Los Angeles, simply wrote, "Negotiate. Hell! Where's the Seventh Cavalry?"[124] The Seventh Cavalry was Custer's old command and the unit that carried out the 1890 massacre. Edward C. Mann from Michigan asked if the government had "forgotten how to deal with Indians," arguing it should "promise them anything but give them a scrap of paper."[125]

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[121] "Statement of Hank Adams to the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Indian Affairs," April 19, 1973, 28. Hank Adams Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

[122] B.A. Christie to Kent Frizzell, March 31, 1973, Frizzell Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.

[123] Kenneth Sater to Kent Frizzell, May 2, 1973, Frizzell Papers Box 3, Folder 13.

[124] Peter Peel, Letter to the Editor, *Time*, April 2, 1973.

[125] Edward C. Mann, Letter to the Editor, *Time*, April 16, 1973.

Although commentators, the public, and the different federal entities at Wounded Knee argued over the best strategy to end the occupation, the day-to-day realities of the occupation took a toll on the federal agents. In another editorial for the *Tribune,* Wiedrich wrote the agents at Wounded Knee were "hapless pawns of a government too paternal and too distant to recognize a phony Indian uprising when it saw one."[126] The issues for the marshals ranged from average boredom (an issue than plagued those inside Wounded Knee as well), to various reports of agents seeing ghosts, hearing disembodied voices, or reporting gunshots when there were none. At least one marshal had to be removed from duty after he hallucinated hordes of Indians overrunning his bunker, and he opened fire on the phantom Indians.[127] The Native Americans attributed the visions and reports of disembodied voices to their ancestors from the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre providing spiritual protection during the potential second massacre. However, it also in many respects speaks to developing myth from Vietnam, excessive drug use by soldiers.[128]

While there is no evidence that the marshals regularly engaged in drug use, they did spend their time in the bunkers engaged in strange activities. At some point during the standoff, a pregnant dog on the reservation gave birth to a litter of puppies, and each federal bunker received a puppy to care for. As final surrender approached, the marshals had little to do and spent their time conducting mock raids—even using tear gas—on

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[126] "Indian Siege Hard on FBI, Marshals," *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1973, KFP, Box 2, Folder 13.

[127] Smith and Warrior, 246.

[128] See Jeremy Kuzmarov, *The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs*, *Culture, Politics, and the Cold War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

other bunkers in the hopes of capturing the bunker's puppy.[129] Another photograph taken during the occupation further captures the oddity of the affair. The photograph depicts a marshal, again clothed in a camouflage jumpsuit, sitting in the middle of a bunker loading or cleaning an M-16. Around him are another ten M-16s, lined up on top of the bunker's sandbags and seemingly ready for use at a moment's notice. The weapons in that bunker alone more than likely outclassed the entire stockpile inside Wounded Knee, even if people smuggled out weapons or never turned some over to the federal government.

The most striking thing about the photograph, however, is not the amount of weapons, but the smile across the marshal's face as he goes about loading the weapon. It is impossible to tell what the smile is in response to, but when combined with the numerous weapons around him, the photograph has a sinister look to it. When Lieutenant William Calley went on trial for the My Lai Massacre, the prosecutor asked what he thought he did in the village. Calley responded that they "weren't in My Lai to kill human beings. We were there to kill ideology that is carried by—I don't know. Pawns. Blobs. Pieces of Flesh, and I wasn't in My Lai to destroy intelligent men. I was there to destroy an intangible idea." Others present at My Lai later invoked "the Indian idea…the only good gook is a dead gook."[130] Some marshals at Wounded Knee had a very negative impression of the Indian occupiers, caricaturizing them as classic savages and fantasizing about what they would do when they captured one. Describing the situation in front of him, the marshal said, "They're still roamin' out there, the Injuns. They'd love to get a

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[129] "Tired Men Wait in Wounded Knee Bunkers,' *New York Times,* May 8, 1973.

[130] Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 456.

whitey."[131] Two months later, as the conflict came to its bloody end, another U.S. marshal stationed in a government roadblock threatened to cut off the hair of any "long-haired hippie dudes…with long black hair with pigtails" the government search party managed to capture.[132] For Marshal Jim Crawford the inability to arrest those inside Wounded Knee continually created frustration. According to Crawford, "These people down there have broken the law, but we've not been permitted to go in there and get them."[133] Was the marshal in the photograph cleaning his gun and joking about how quickly he could end the occupation if given the chance? At least some of his fellow officers were.

The weary marshals got their wishes when the occupation ended on May 8. As the FBI inspected the village to ensure everyone was out, the America flag replaced the AIM flag that had flown over the village during the occupation. The government declared the village secure with an announcement over the government radios followed by five gunshot volleys.[134] Interestingly, by ending the occupation this way, the federal government partly endorsed the "war footing" AIM claimed when they declared the village the Independent Oglala Nation. For Native Americans, especially those inside Wounded Knee, the imagery from the end of the siege spoke of imperialism, domination,

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[131] "Indians at Wounded Knee Free 11 Held for 2 Days," *New York Times*, March 2, 1973.

[132] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 206.

[133] "Tired Men Wait in Wounded Knee Bunkers," *New York Times*, May 8, 1973.

[134] "Wounded Knee Retaken by The U.S.," *The Sun*, May 9, 1973, KFP, Box 3, Folder 18.

and conquest. For some Americans it invoked pride, honor, and dignity. It also spoke to something the United States government was unable to do in the real Vietnam War–win.

The Green Berets climaxes with the NLF overrunning Dodge City and forcing the Americans to abandon the fort. As the Americans and the friendly Vietnamese flee the fort and wait for air support, the NLF begin looting the bodies of dead soldiers inside the fort. Whooping and yelling the whole time, they rip boots, shirts, watches, and anything else they can off the bodies. Eventually, the Americans retake the fort, and as men solemnly go about arranging bodies for removal, the officers survey the damage, ending underneath the flagpole with the NLF flag still flying. As Wayne's character, Colonel Mike Kirby, looks up, the camera cuts to the flag, and tense, high-pitched music replaces the quiet solemn music that had been playing. Kirby angrily grabs a knife and cuts down the flag, the first step in starting to rebuild the fort. The scene ends with Kirby stating the men will get some sleep then start all over again in the morning. While the scene attempts to convey the determination of the United States to win the war in Vietnam, it also highlights the futility of the whole affair.

Just as John Wayne lost the war with the *Green Berets*, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Richard Hallstern used Wayne to joke about government forces not forcibly retaking the village, quipping "I am prepared to state categorically and unequivocally that John Wayne is nowhere upon this Reservation and we have no intentions of calling him in…at this time." There would be no tank or horse rides through Wounded Knee this time.[135] Pat Oliphant, the political cartoonist who was working at the *Denver Post* at the

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[135] Hank Adams, Memorandum, "Participation in Negotiations for the Wounded Knee Settlement," May 16, 1973, 28. Hank Adams Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

time, satirized the government attempts to end Wounded Knee with a cartoon that included Wayne, gun in hand, on his horse ready to ride into Wounded Knee. Instead, the line of FBI men in front of him tell him simply, "Not just now, Mr. Wayne…perhaps later…."[136] In contrast to Wayne's 1974 appearance at Harvard Yard in an armored personnel carrier, in 1973 there would be no grand charge or attack. For most Americans the Western marked a bygone era, one in which the divisions between good and evil were much more clearly demarcated. In contrast, by the late 1960s and early 1970s many were reassessing who exactly were the heroes and villains.

Bury My Heart: The New Indian History

Woody Kipp, a Blackfoot Indian and Vietnam veteran, attempted to sneak into Wounded Knee with a group of other Indians when an armored personnel carrier on patrol spotted the group. As they hid from the APC's spotlight in a snowy ravine, a popping sound filled the air overhead. Kipp instantly knew the sound, writing in his memoir that, "I had heard it every night for twenty months in Vietnam as the security forces defended the air base at Da Nang." As he lay in the ravine listening he realized that the Vietnamese who looked at his dark skin and stated they were the same were right. Suddenly in his own country, he "was the gook now."[137] Another Indian Vietnam veteran related a similar sentiment, arguing that he joined the Marines because he thought it was the "Indian Way." Yet, after arriving in Vietnam, he realized "that instead of being a

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[136] Pat Oliphant cartoon, reprinted in *Syracuse New Times*, April 5, 1973. Carol Sullivan Papers, Oversized box.

[137] Woody Kipp, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 126.

warrior like Crazy Horse, I was a scout used by the army to track him down. I was on the wrong side of everything I wanted to believe in."[138] Kipp's powerful comments highlight the ways in which, even for many Native Americans, the original purpose for the occupation quickly became lost in discussions of pan-Indian issues or the ongoing war. Kipp writes that many Indians supported the movement because "they knew something was fundamentally wrong with life on the reservation" even if they could not fully articulate the issues.[139] Thus, for many Native Americans the protest became another attack against the government's Indian policy and not the impeachment of Dick Wilson. At the same time, many non-Natives "fought their way through the myths of American History" looking for precedents to the Vietnam War and "'discovered' the Indian."[140] The period of the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a rewriting of the narrative, both in books and the screen, that portrayed the United States and whites as the savages, while Native Americans and the Vietnamese became the resilient heroes. In turn, Wounded Knee became a way to avenge past injustices for both Natives and non-Natives.

Less than a year after the takeover of Alcatraz by a group of American Indian activists began, Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* appeared in print and remained on the bestseller lists for over a year; in the process it became one of the top-selling books on college campuses across the United

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[138] Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 175.

[139] Kipp, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee*, 115.

[140] Peter Collier, "Wounded Knee: The New Indian War," *Ramparts*, June 1973, 28.

States.[141] Brown chronicled the history of Native Americans and the various treaties, massacres, and ill treatment by the American government roughly between the end of the Civil War and the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890. Americans, according to Brown, "Have always looked westward when reading about this period should read this book facing eastward."[142] Brown's history was so poignant that many took him to be a Native American. During an early telephone call, his publisher asked the author he had yet to meet in person if he was an Indian. Brown replied, "Yes and no. Indian is a state of mind," and added in a later interview, "I prefer their view of the world…Indians have a kinship with nature. They don't make rivers dirty and foul up the air. In fact, I believe that it is now within their power to save the white man."[143]

Brown's views on Native Americans mirrored those of the counterculture movement that wholeheartedly embraced Native Americans. In addition to environmentalism, Native Americans served as "perfect foils to all that these predominately Anglo Americans disdained about their parents' lives." For the youth of the counterculture, Indians embodied "genuine holdouts against American conformity" with their spirituality, ecology, and communal living.[144] While the renewed embrace of

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[141] "What They're Reading on Campuses," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 5, 1972, 5.

[142] Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, 4th Owl Books ed. (New York: H. Holt & Co, 2007), xxiv.

[143] "The Story Behind the Book: 'Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee'," *Publisher's Weekly*, April 19, 1971, 35.

[144] Sherry L. Smith, "Indians, the Counterculture, and the New Left," in Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler, eds., *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism Since 1900* (Santa Fe, N.M: School for Advanced Research, 2007), 144. Smith expanded on the article in *Hippies, Indians and the Fight for Red Power.*

Native Americans brought attention to their causes, it also troubled many Native Americans. Vine Deloria Jr., in his popular *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, argued that "because people can see right through us, it becomes impossible to tell truth from fiction or fact from mythology. Experts paint us as they would like us to be. Often we paint ourselves as we wish we were or as we might have been."[145] This fact, as he would later write in an editorial in the Los Angeles *Times* during the occupation of Wounded Knee, prohibited Native Americans "from having a modern identity" and forced them to be "unreal and ahistorical."[146]

Even though thousands of Indians lived in the nation's urban centers, many felt if they wanted a voice they had to turn to tactics like Alcatraz or Wounded Knee and don the ceremonial headdresses and buckskins that characterized most portrayals of Native Americans. In addition to promoting myths and stereotypes, the renewed embrace of Native Americans was, at times, a shallow parallel between historical Indians and the ongoing crisis in Vietnam. In the introduction to *Bury My Heart*, Brown wrote that the new history was not "cheerful…but history has a way of intruding upon the present, and perhaps those who read it will have a clearer understanding of what the American Indian is, by knowing what he was."[147] While Brown may have meant the occupation of Alcatraz, many reviewers used the book to pull in the war in Vietnam. R.Z. Sheppard,

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[145] Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 2.

[146] Vine Deloria Jr., "Bury Our Hopes at Wounded Knee," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1973, Kent Frizzell Papers, Box 2, Folder 3; Deloria, 2.

[147] Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Picador, 2000), xxv.

reviewing the book in *Time* magazine, wrote that, "Decades of worthless treaties, search-and-destroy missions, pacification programs, enforced relocations and free-fire zones ended at Wounded Knee," all of which were terms repeatedly used by the military to describe missions in Vietnam.[148] A review in *Newsweek* called the book "A damning case against our national roots in greed, perfidy, ignorance, and malice," and newspaperman Elliot Arnold commented to the book's publisher that, "Anyone who wants to know the historical genesis of My Lai should read this book."[149] While reviewers compared the history in Brown's book to Vietnam, a group of Hollywood directors made no attempts to hide their comparisons between Native Americans, the counterculture, and the war in Vietnam.

Revisionist Westerns: Indians as the Vietnamese and the Counterculture

In the early 1970s movie studios released a string of movies now termed revisionist westerns. Instead of emphasizing John Wayne style characters, the new films promoted more Native Americans, women, and anti-war heroes. The revisionist westerns not only pushed the audience to side with the Indians, they drew overt parallels to the ongoing war in Vietnam. The most obvious and violent of the three, *Soldier Blue* (1970), depicted the 1864 massacre of Black Kettle's Cheyenne by Colorado regiments at Sand Creek. After researching the massacre and Native American history, director Ralph Nelson became enraged at America's Indian policy, writing that the Native Americans "helped Pilgrims, showing them how to grow corn and other crops. Their reward—

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[148] R.Z. Sheppard, "The Forked-Tongue Syndrome," *Time*, February 1, 1971, 80.

[149] "The Story Behind the Book: 'Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee'," 34.

extinction."[150] Nelson's final product combined the Sand Creek and Wounded Knee Massacres into one of the most realistic depictions of violence to appear on the movie screen.[151] Importantly, Nelson's main point in creating *Soldier Blue* was not to attack the government's Indian policies, but rather its Vietnam policy. As Jacquelyn Kilpatrick argues, Nelson used "Indians as a metaphor, an exotic one by which an audience could feel sympathy from a distance."[152] According to Nelson, *Soldier Blue* was meant to show "the true face of war…how it changes normally peaceful men into savage beasts."[153] *Soldier Blue*'s climax, in which the Colorado regiments raid Spotted Wolf's camp, drew attention not only for its vivid depictions of violence and rape but also because of the extraordinary parallels between the images on screen and the infamous photographs of the 1968 My Lai massacre. In one famous segment from the movie's climatic scene, a boy attempts to hide in a tipi only to be shot through the eye by a bullet. At the same time, the village's women and children attempt to seek shelter in a ravine near the camp only to become trapped and shot one by one.

The imagery in *Soldier Blue* and My Lai is so similar that many viewers and critics argued Nelson drew inspiration for the concluding scene from the events in Vietnam. However, as P.B. Hurst documents in his book *The Most Savage Film*, Nelson was aware of the events prior to shooting the concluding act in the ravine, but the film's

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[150] Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 126.

[151] Ibid., 126-7; Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 77.

[152] Ibid., 79.

[153] Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian*, 127.

completed script included the scene prior to the My Lai photographs appearing in December 1969.[154] Nevertheless, Nelson and the film's promotional team used the parallels as a selling point for the film. In a promotional packet for the film, Candice Bergen, who played a white woman living with the Indians, described the film as "a fable on Vietnam."[155] On the day of the film's New York release, the production company sent "Indians"—whites wearing Indian headdresses and attire—into the streets with posters asking, "Why *Soldier Blue*?" which the promoters hoped would lead people to draw connections between the violence on the screen and the war in Vietnam. The film met with mixed reviews from critics, but it also brought in a record opening day gross for the Ziegfeld Theater, where it premiered.[156]

Another important revisionist western, and the most successful commercially, was Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970). The film depicts Jack Crabb, a 121-year-old white man recounting his story of moving between white and Indian society after being adopted by a group of Cheyenne Indians. Over the course of his life Crabb found himself present at such events as the Washita Creek Massacre and the Battle of Little Bighorn, all the while unable to fit in with much of white society. Overall, Penn's Cheyennes relate less to the oppressed Vietnamese or real Native Americans than to the burgeoning counterculture movement in America. The movie includes a homosexual Indian, sees Jack Crabb form a polygamous marriage with an Indian wife and her three sisters after

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[154] P. B. Hurst, *The Most Savage Film: Soldier Blue, Cinematic Violence, and the Horrors of War* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2008), 129.

[155] Ibid., 30.

[156] Ibid., 156-7.

their husbands die, and includes a "contrary"—an Indian who does everything backwards.

In a similar vein, *A Man Called Horse* (1970) utilized the work of George Catlin and Carl Bodmer to provide little more than a white savage fantasy about being able to cast off the ills of the modern world and become an Indian. After being captured by a band of Sioux John Morgan agrees to take part in a sun vow to prove his courage. Following a day standing outside, Morgan is brought to a ceremonial lodge where his chest is pierced and he is hoisted up into the air. As the pain becomes overbearing, Morgan slips into a psychedelic vision in which Morgan's European clothes are stripped away, leaving him a true man who can now embrace his Indian princess. The movie concludes with Morgan replacing the village's chief after his death in battle and successfully defending the village from a rival tribe by employing the European two-volley line. Morgan is nothing more than a new version of Natty Bumppo from James Fennimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* or Buffalo Bill. Each either cast off or lived outside white society, where they manage to become better Indians than the real ones while retaining the "benefits" of white society.

In addition to portraying white society as corrupted, violent, and hypocritical, *Little Big Man* also flips the narrative when it comes to George Armstrong Custer and the Battle of Little Bighorn. Crabb first encounters Custer as his business is being cleared out after Crabb goes bankrupt because he was too gullible for white society. Custer proclaims that Crabb should "go west!" The proclamation is one of Custer's many "truths," statements that are little more than pronouncements by a clearly insane man. Crabb ultimately goes west with his wife but ends up enlisting with Custer after she is captured.

The film concludes with the Battle of Little Bighorn when Custer ignores all advice from his subordinates and Crabb and charges into battle. Unfortunately for Custer, there is no heroic last stand; instead, the general hallucinates making a speech to Congress as his men are killed all around him. Penn makes his most overt connection with Vietnam when he has Custer lash out at his second in command for his "self-righteousness" in questioning Custer's orders to kill the Indians' ponies. The film then cuts between shots of the men slaughtering not only the ponies, but also the women who attempt to flee the violence only to be shot in the back. The massacre concludes with Crabb's Indian wife dying as she tries to flee the village with the couple's baby on her back. Interestingly, Penn chose to cast Aimée Eccles, a native of Hong Kong, for the role, further connecting Penn's Native Americans with the Vietnamese.[157] Penn undoubtedly wished viewers to draw parallels between Custer and William Calley, the Army officer convicted for his role in My Lai, as Penn stated: "the film is contemporary because…history does repeat itself."[158]

The New Popular History and Wounded Knee

The popularity of Dee Brown's book and the string of revisionist westerns, along with previous support for native occupations such as the occupation of Alcatraz and the Bureau of Indian Affairs building, influenced the governmental and public responses to the occupation. A national poll found a slim majority of Americans, fifty-one percent,

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[157] Paul Andrew Hutton, "'Correct in Every Detail': General Custer in Hollywood," in Paul Andrew Hutton, ed., *The Custer Reader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 515.

[158] Hank Adams, Memorandum, "Participation in Negotiations for the Wounded Knee Settlement," May 16, 1973, 28. Hank Adams Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

supported the occupation, with the highest support coming from the young, well-off Easterners, along with minorities, Catholics, and union members.[159] With the popularity of the occupation amongst college students, government officials feared the coming spring breaks would create a "Woodstock of the North," or as Vine Deloria, Jr. labeled it, "the last rock festival and clan gathering of the New Left."[160] The influx of support not only threatened to prolong an occupation that was in its third month, but Dick Wilson's growing resentment towards the government's policy created the potential for serious violence. Wilson and the Tribal Council argued the reservation had been "invaded" by a large number of non-natives, explicitly noting support from the National Council of Churches, and the tribal court banned all non-residents from the reservation on March 16.[161] The potential support, while welcomed by the occupation, also posed a problem. An increase in the number of non-Natives, many failing to fully comprehend the complex issues involved in the occupation, threatened to overrun a Native protest and open the door for a government crackdown. While some non-Natives took part in the occupation, the biggest direct action from non-Native supporters came during several airdrops sponsored by anti-war organizations.

While few non-Natives found their way to Wounded Knee, many sent donations, letters of support, and lobbied government negotiators for a peaceful and just conclusion to the occupation. Over the first week of May, as the United States prepared for the end

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[159] *Miami Herald*, April 2, 1973, KFP, Box 2, Folder 3.

[160] Lyman and O'Neil, *Wounded Knee 1973*, 98, 106; Deloria, "Bury Our Hopes at Wounded Knee."

[161] Executive Committee Resolution 73-09XB, Frizzell Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

of the occupation, rumors spread, via a coordinated phone campaign across the country, of a government plan to forcibly retake the village. While Hank Adams felt the occupation had until at least the second half of May to end the occupation without a threat of a forceful retaking, the rumors prompted an influx of telegraphs to Kent Frizzell, the government's lead negotiator, from across the country.[162] Most of the messages over the period came from standard leftist and liberal groups, primarily anti-war, black liberation, and Native-allied groups. Nevertheless, telegrams also came from people like eleven-year-old Roberta Dunn from Philadelphia. Dunn, an African American, wrote to Frizzell that, "The Indians are really being treated wrong. I have been treated wrong but not as wrong as the Indians have."[163] Others such as Eunice Wahlberg, from Dearborn, Michigan, invoked the new wave of supportive Native American movies and books. Wahlberg asked Frizzell if he had read *Bury My Heart*, "If not, do read it. Let's not commit further bloodshed–or starve babies."[164] A day later, Claire Michaels from Santa Monica sent a telegram that read in part, "Starving children is to follow Watergate? Americans are quickly becoming the World's number one monsters–can't you see that?"[165] Lynn King made a veiled reference to My Lai in her letter when she wrote, "We need no second massacre to demonstrate the enlightened humanitarian values of the United States."[166]

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[162] Various telegrams to Kent Frizzell, KFP, Box 3; Hank Adams, "Memo/Wounded Knee Negotiations," Hank Adams Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, 16.

[163] Roberta Dunn to Kent Frizzell, May 2, 1973, KFP, Box 3, Folder 13.

[164] Eunice Wahlberg to Kent Frizzell, May 5, 1973, KFP, Box 3, Folder 16.

[165] Claire Michaels to Kent Frizzell, May 5, 1973, KFP, Box 3, Folder 17.

[166] Lynn King to Kent Frizzell, May 1, 1973, KFP, Box 3, Folder 12.

The communications Frizzell received highlight the fact that while many supported the Native Americans in the event, the cultural events of the past months and years heavily influenced the discourse. Frizzell received a few letters prior to early May, but it was not until the rumors of an invasion became public that people voiced their opinions on the occupation en masse. As noted, the threat of an invasion was minimal at best given the disastrous public relations that would result. Nevertheless, the thought of a second Wounded Knee (or My Lai) drove people to the local Western Union office faster than at any other point during the seventy-one-day standoff. While some people implored Frizzell and the government to give the Indians a "fair deal," most failed to mention any of AIM's or OSCRO's demands. Preventing the nineteenth century or Vietnam from repeating in South Dakota overshadowed sovereignty, the removal of Dick Wilson, and the other demands. As non-Natives attempted to comprehend the occupation in terms of history, Native Americans attempted to deal with what the occupation meant for them. While non-Natives had little connection to whatever happened at Wounded Knee, Native Americans had numerous connections to an occupation that for some seemed to be growing more absurd by the day.

"We Have Been Nearly Destroyed Emotionally by the Incident": Wounded Knee for Native Americans

The *Chicago Tribune* Magazine quoted Colin Smith, a reporter covering Wounded Knee for the London *Observer*, saying, "If only someone would say, 'When the moon comes over the mountain and the leaves fall off the trees on the night when the cherries turn red, we will attack the long rifles.' All I hear is, 'Yeah, man…cool it…and

we will study this procedural matter.'"[167] The quote exemplifies the argument Vine Deloria made in his Los Angeles *Times* editorial that as Indians began "to emerge as modern people…the press embraced Chief Red Fox."[168] Red Fox, a nephew of Crazy Horse and a Sioux performer who appeared in various Nickelodeons and Buffalo Bill's Wild West, gained notoriety when he pretended to scalp King Edward VII of England during a London performance of the Wild West. In his memoirs released in 1971, Red Fox admitted there was a "strain of suppressed malignancy" in his veins when he thought of all his ancestors accused of scalping White men while he stood over the King hitting him with a rubber tomahawk.[169] Interestingly, Red Fox became an Indian activist late in his life and devoted the final chapter of his memoir to chronicling the various injustices heaped on Native Americans over the years. Nevertheless, for Deloria, the "crazy insurrection" that aroused White America, almost emotionally destroyed Native America and left Indian "lives, culture, and identity…twisted and shaped by this event in a manner and to an extent that white Americans will never understand."[170]

In part, the tensions stemmed from the divide between Indians who believed something needed to be done in relation to Native treaty rights, but did not support the protests of AIM and the OSCRO. The divide appeared in the previous occupations of Alcatraz and the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in November 1972. During fish-ins in

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[167] "Wounded Knee: The Press Takes It On the Chin," *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, April 15, 1973, KFP, Box 2, Folder 15.

[168] Deloria, "Bury Our Hopes at Wounded Knee."

[169] Red Fox, *The Memoirs of Chief Red Fox* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1989), 142-3.

[170] Deloria Jr., "Bury Our Hopes at Wounded Knee."

the Northwest that protested restrictions on tribal fishing rights, locals derided the National Indian Youth Council as "college kids in sports jackets who showed up merely to make themselves look good."[171] One Oglala woman interviewed during Wounded Knee angrily stated that she did not "need Russell Means to come in here and tell me how to be an Indian."[172] Writing in 1983, poet, novelist and cultural critic Gerald Vizenor, a White Earth Ojibwe, argued that the American Indian Movement, and Banks in particular, "gained fame and relative wealth on the collective name of the tribal poor and on the ideologies of oppression."[173] Vizenor also attacked the movement for pulling its "radical rhetoric" not from traditional tribal sources, but rather from their time in prison. In addition, Vizenor argued that the movement's members looked like they derived their look in part from Edward Curtis's iconic portraits of Native Americans. The members "never seem to smile, an incautious throwback to a stoical tribal visage when camera shutters and film speeds were slower."[174]

The movement did have its supporters throughout Indian Country, however. One elderly resident of Pine Ridge noted in response to the occupation that, "I've lived 77 years and my reservation has been in total darkness. It's had a blanket thrown over it– we're living in darkness. And somewhere these young people who started AIM came to our reservation and turned the light on. Now the light is on our reservation and the light is

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[171] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 46.

[172] "The Siege Nobody Wanted," *New York Times*, April 8, 1973.

[173] Gerald Vizenor, "Dennis of Wounded Knee," *American Indian Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1983): 51–65, 60.

[174] Ibid., 55.

getting bigger and now we can see things."[175] In response to their critics, many Native Americans involved in the protests contested the radical classification and argued that the movement was not what it was portrayed in the news media. Leonard Crow Dog, the movement's spiritual leader, argued that the movement was not fighting white people, but "the white man's system."[176] Leonard's future wife, Mary Crow Dog, added in her memoirs that she never considered herself a radical or revolutionary. Instead, she and others wanted to "be left alone, to live our lives as we see fit. To govern ourselves in reality and not just on paper."[177] Grace Black Elk furthered the comments when she argued that the FBI surrounding Wounded Knee was "more militant—they're military," adding that while she was an AIM member, "we're not militant—unless we're forced to be."[178]

Although AIM strove for non-violence, they found the media only paid attention to them when they "got rowdy" and not when they "behaved nicely." Annoyed by this fact, Russell Means once angrily asked reporters, "What do we have to do to get some attention? Scalp somebody?"[179] For many in AIM, Wounded Knee arose, in part, out of failures to achieve reforms from within the system. Instead, many now felt they had nothing to do but put on the headdresses and "get rowdy."

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[175] "Interview with Severt Young Bear of Pine Ridge Reservation–"The light is Getting Bigger", *Liberation News Service*, Undated, Finzel Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

[176] Mary Brave Bird and Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (New York: Grove Press, 2011), 140.

[177] Ibid., 111.

[178] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 235.

[179] Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, 88.

AIM conducted a highly theatrical protest that emphasized first and foremost pan-Indian tribal sovereignty and attacked years of government policy. The demands for tribal sovereignty posed an issue for AIM when they did demand the removal of Dick Wilson from office, as it seemed the organization contradicted itself by asking the federal government to get involved in a tribal affair. Additionally, many questioned how far the group's demands to be left alone went, namely, the fact that AIM wanted government funds for programs on the reservations. The important thing to understand about the requests of AIM and other Indian rights activists is that they did not want total sovereignty (an independent nation). Instead, they wanted to create a "protectorate status for all Indian nations."[180] Instead of having the BIA or another government organization divide up and allocate funds, all the money would be provided to tribal governments who would have complete say over where and how they distributed the money. In a Senate Indian Affairs subcommittee hearing, Means explained the new distinction to a confused South Dakota Senator James Abourezk as something akin to the relationship between San Marino and Italy in regards to San Marino's armed forces. San Marino, an independent enclave wholly inside Italy, has ceremonial armed forces, but Italy's army, through an agreement signed by the two, provides for its national defense.[181]

Surprisingly, during the early seventies, the movement's demands seemed to have the support of President Richard Nixon. While Nixon is remembered for Watergate and

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[180] United States Government, Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, *Occupation of Wounded Knee: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs off the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, United States Senate, Ninety-third Congress, first session … June 16, 1973, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, June 17, 1973, Kyle, South Dakota* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1974), 141-42

[181] Ibid.

as a Cold Warrior, his administration had favorable policies towards Native Americans. Most notably the administration fully disavowed the policy of termination. The policy had fallen out of favor in the preceding years, but in a July 8, 1970, speech, Nixon stated the premise behind the act, that the United States government took on the trustee relationship as an act of generosity and could end the relationship whenever it felt like it, violated the solemn obligations and treaties the government signed with tribes. In addition, Nixon acknowledged the disastrous effects the policy had on the tribes who went through it and the fear it caused in tribes not yet terminated. Nixon promised increased Indian control of federal programs and schools and argued, "Self-determination among the Indian people can and must be encouraged without the threat of eventual termination."[182] The administration also pushed for, and secured, the return of the Blue Lake and land to the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. Teddy Roosevelt took the area, which the tribe considers sacred, in the early part of the twentieth century when he created the Carson National Forest. However, Nixon's policies, while beneficial for Native Americans, were highly calculated political moves. The Republican Party fared poorly with minority voters, and the administration hoped the policies would bolster their image and boost party support. The policies allowed the administration to go after white sympathy votes, claiming the policies showed the administration worked to improve the lives of minorities.[183] The policies found support with some Native Americans, but looking back, Phillip Deloria writes, they were "misleading in that they encouraged the

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[182] Richard Nixon, Special Message on Indian Affairs, July 8, 1970. Accessed from http://www.epa.gov/tribalportal/pdf/president-nixon70.pdf. Accessed on June 15, 2018.

[183] Robert Burnette and John P Koster, *The Road to Wounded Knee* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 165-7.

hope of many Indians and their non-Indian friends that the key to the solution of Indian problems is to convince someone high enough in government to become an Indian advocate…"[184]

Whatever Nixon and the administration felt about Native Americans, protests such as the occupation of Alcatraz and the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in November of 1972 eroded any goodwill the administration had. When AIM attempted to set up a meeting with the administration in the fall of 1972, as part of the Trail of Broken Treaties protest, Nixon angrily replied that he did more to help Native Americans than any president in the last century and did not feel a meeting with the group was warranted.[185] After failing to secure a meeting with the President, the group tried to get meetings with members of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Interior Department. However, the attempts ended up with the group occupying the BIA offices, which they renamed the Native American Embassy, for a week.[186] By Wounded Knee, the administration was ready to take a hardline approach. However, the skillful use of Wounded Knee and the history it invoked prevented the government from quickly ending the occupation once it began. Thus the government ended up in negotiations that looked like a modern version of the sessions that led to the Fort Laramie Treaty, the legal basis for many of AIM's claims.

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[184] Phillip Deloria, "The Era of Indian Self-Determination: An Overview," in Philp and Institute of the American West, *Indian Self-Rule*, 202.

[185] Ibid., 205.

[186] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 157.

Many of the 1973 negotiations, including those that led to the first agreement to end the conflict, took place in a tipi the occupiers erected outside the village. When Kent Frizzell and other government negotiators entered the tipi they sat on the same ground as the Native Americans. Some government officials involved in the proceedings mocked the various ceremonial practices, saying, "Imagine having to sit on the earth around a buffalo skull in order to talk to those people."[187] For his part Frizzell regularly embraced the idea and tried to use his Midwestern background to connect with the groups. In response, the *Wichita Eagle* published a cartoon depicting Frizzell attempting to gain a meeting with Nixon in a business suit and a feathered headband.[188] While government officials mocked the negotiation ceremonies, the occupiers mocked the government for what they felt was an excessive amount of force. In one instance the group spray-painted an old beat-up Chevrolet van with "APC" on the front and "Official AIM use only" on one of the doors. This "APC" served as the village's official "AIM Personnel Carrier" and transported members to meetings in the neutral tipi.[189] In another instance, an occupier rode out to a government APC in an old Datsun and started hitting the sides of the armored vehicle and "counting coup," imagery that invokes memories of outmatched plains tribes of the nineteenth century attempting to count coup as white soldiers shoot at them with guns.[190] Means also regularly pointed out the government's firepower advantage and the history all too familiar to many non-Natives when, as he said in one

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[187] Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, 140-1.

[188] *Wichita Eagle* cartoon, Frizzell Papers, Box 3, Folder 1.

[189] *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, 134.

[190] Brave Bird and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, 135.

negotiation session, "this is our last gasp as a sovereign people. If not, there will be a massacre."[191]

Conclusion

The occupation of Wounded Knee came at the tail end of the Vietnam War and followed a decade that witnessed mass protests and the formation of new political identities. Whether it was conservatives wishing for law and order to finally take command or counter-culture influenced by a wave of movies and books that portrayed Native Americans far more favorably than previous narratives, Wounded Knee became something different to everyone who viewed it. While these cultural references increased the exposure of Native Americans, they also built upon a variety of stereotypes that obscured many of the underlying issues AIM and the occupiers of Wounded Knee fought to resolve. Wounded Knee became a "crazy insurrection" that fascinated and amazed white audiences caught up in the new history of Native Americans and parallels to oppressed groups in struggles of national liberation, but their understanding of the crisis only went so deep. The occupation got support, but it was not enough to overcome the Nixon administration's determination to draw the line on what it would do for Native Americans. In the years following Wounded Knee the government would increase its campaign to weaken and destroy the organization, while many non-Natives lost Wounded Knee's true history, replacing it with a murky story of an uprising and the murder of FBI agents. Wounded Knee, however, was not the end for American Indian activists in the United States. While the Department of Justice and the FBI sought to crack down on

[191] Means, Minutes for Negotiation Session 7, March 31, 1973, KFP, Box 1, Folder 16.

AIM, activists increasingly began looking outside the U.S. for the next place to make their stand. In a 2011 speech at Augustana College, Russell Means reflected on Wounded Knee and noted the occupation "was the spark that started the worldwide indigenous revolution."[192] The next year activists from across the US and the world would meet on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation to form the International Indian Treaty Council. At the same time AIM dealt with in-fighting, highly publicized trials that drained resources, and declining public attention, indigenous activists began the process of securing representation at an international level, creating a stark contrast between the discord that usually typifies AIM of the 1970s and some of the greatest unity and success in the history of indigenous activism.

[192] Russell Means, speech at Augustana College, Sioux City, South Dakota, April 27, 2011. American History Television, C-SPAN3. Accessed from https://www.c-span.org/video/?306499-1/wounded-knee-1973-forty-years-later

CHAPTER III

DISUNITY AT HOME, ALLIANCES ABROAD

Some of my friends have made strange alliances.
But will not say so, or tell me anything.
The situation makes for a dark situation
But not so that I can admit that it is night.

- Jimmie Durham, "Yellow Thunder Red Thunder"[1]

For its tenth anniversary in 1978 the American Indian Movement released a commemorative poster that incorporated a painting by Mohawk spiritual leader Chief Lewis Hall. The painting (Figure 1), which grew out of a dream Hall had, included a silhouette of an American Indian fighter at Wounded Knee, a U.S. and Canadian flag upside-down as a sign of distress, and a clan mother of the Mohawk Nation clearly made to mimic the Statue of Liberty, an appropriate invocation that came close to the American bi-centennial celebration in 1976. The poster proclaimed the "Red Man's Great International Warrior Society" that was "pledged to fight white man's injustice to Indians" regardless of the location in North America.[2] In addition to proclaiming the organization would go anywhere in the hemisphere to defend indigenous rights, the

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[1] "Yellow Thunder Red Thunder" in Jimmie Durham, *Columbus Day: [Poems, Drawings and Stories About American Indian Life and Death in the Nineteen-Seventies* (Minneapolis, MN: West End Press, 1993), 27.

[2] Information on the background of the poster described by Clyde Bellecourt is available in "A.I.M. 10th Anniversary Poster. Roger A. Finzel American Indian Movement Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico. Box 1, Folder 2. The posters were sold to benefit AIM survival schools.

alliance with a Mohawk artist connected the group to the most prominent transnational indigenous conflict in the United States and centered AIM's second decade of activism as one rooted in international issues while remaining rooted in its history in the United States.[3]

Figure 1: AIM 10th Anniversary Poster

[3] In addition to issuing their own passports, the Haudenosaunee have engaged in protests in the twentieth century arising from their territory straddling the United States/Canada border. Most famously Mohawks blockaded the Seaway International Bridge in 1968 proclaiming Canadian taxes were violations of their treaty rights. In 1990 members of the Mohawk Warrior Society engaged in an armed conflict with Canadian police over the construction of a golf course on Cornwall Island that was part of the Mohawk territory. Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus* (2014) provides an overview of the events and a discussion of how Mohawk "politics of refusal" allows for asserting their sovereignty against U.S. and Canadian demands.

Following the end of the Wounded Knee Occupation, the small hamlet returned to a quiet part of the reservation, albeit one filled with burned out buildings and bullet holes. In the months and years that followed the American Indian Movement found itself confronting how it moved forward while at the same time dealing with a copious amount of legal issues that threatened to fracture the movement into an irrelevant blip in American history. Yet the movement was not the "flickering, intermittent presence" that some historians have labelled it.[4] Instead the 1970s witnessed a growing campaign that did move "jerkily, like some drunk guy on the Tulsa highway" but for a time rekindled "that hope which can never be extinguished."[5] Regardless of how the evolution happened, the decade that followed the occupation of Wounded Knee was not only one of the most consequential eras of Native American history in the United States, but also one of the most overlooked. AIM never drew the same level of media attention it did with Wounded Knee, but the movement never faded; instead, the perceived failures of the occupation signaled the way forward.

Between 1973 and the middle of the 1980s, Indigenous activists sought to engage the international community as a way of working around negotiations with the United States government that were seen as having achieved little progress in the previous twenty years and had only secured a relatively minor meeting with the Nixon adminstration after Wounded Knee. Instead, members of the American Indian Movement and other indigenous activists formed the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) on

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[4] Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: New Press, 1996), 269.

[5] Durham, *Columbus Day*, 4-5.

the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in 1974 to align U.S. Native Americans with liberation and decolonization movements that had spread around the Third World during the previous decades. The events highlight the issues American Indian activists faced in trying to situate Native issues within western concepts and ideas. As Chadwick Allen argues, transnational Indigenous activists were "both overtly enabled and intimately structured by the complexities of transnational networks, those by-products of the histories and ongoing legacies of various colonialisms."[6] Even though membership in the United Nations and international conferences and tribunals allowed the formation of alliances that sought to bring outside pressure against the United States and compel it to make changes in its policies towards Native Americans, the new arena could only do so much. In addition to the legal and political processes of securing international recognition, the international turn in activism necessitated the formation of political ideologies and situating indigenous issues within the dynamics of the Cold War and western politics. While indigenous politics in the United States and the western hemisphere as a whole were in many ways different from the decolonization struggles taking place in Asia and Africa, activists realized they could not move internationally without more definitively defining themselves.

Yet, for all the progress of the 1970s, activist groups at the start of the 1980s were still struggling to fully articulate ideological positions that expanded beyond basic ideas of opposition to the U.S. government and historical grievances. As a result, as

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[6] Chadwick Allen, "2014 NAISA Presidential Address," in *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2 (Spring 2015), 9; Ibid., "A Transnational Native American Studies? Why Not Studies That Are Trans-Indigenous?" in *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4 (2012), 1-22.

governmental policy shifted under the more conservative Reagan administration, the activist landscape was largely bypassed, which undermined an effective and coordinated response to indigenous issues of the 1980s. These political discussions in the early 1980s were attempts to address this fact and apply the new international ideas to issues in the United States including the protests at Big Mountain, protests on the Diné and Hopi reservations, as well as the Yellow Thunder Camp seeking the return of the Black Hills to the Oglala Sioux. Yet, much of the discussion remained just that, discussion that had little applicability to events affecting indigenous peoples on a daily basis.

While these events do not necessarily translate to concrete advancements, they are nonetheless an important part of Indigenous history in the 1980s. Much of the historiography on Native American issues after 1973 centers on political histories focused on what David Wilkinson called a "bizarre and inconsistent blend of actions" that both continued the self-determination policies of the 1970s and also regularly undermined those very principles.[7] In addition, the principal focal point for studying Native Americans in the 1980s was the dramatic rise of casino gaming, which tended to overshadow other issues.[8] The discussions in the 1980s provide an important

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[7] David E. Wilkins, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, 2nd ed., The Spectrum Series, Race and Ethnicity in National and Global Politics (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 122-123. Additional scholarship on Native Americans and Reagan can be found in George Pierre Castile, *Taking Charge: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy*. (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2015), a follow-up to George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998). Dean J. Kotlowski, "From Backlash to Bingo: Ronald Reagan and Federal Indian Policy," *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 4 (November 2008): 617–52 also provides a good article length discussion of the major issues of the Reagan era.

[8] For gaming see Renée Ann Cramer, *Cash, Color, and Colonialism: The Politics of Tribal Acknowledgment* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005); "Casino Lights and the Quandary of Indian Economic Progress" in Charles F Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of*

counterpoint to the literature on Native Americans and capital development. Finally, while scholars long ago discarded the modernity framework that situated indigenous cultures as a pre-modern period, the early 1980s witnessed many activists embracing a reversion to older life ways that rejected modernity. Even though most Native Americans were not willing to embrace these fringe ideas, the discussions at the tribunal serve as a way of building on the literature of Native Americans and modernity in the twentieth century.[9]

The International Indian Treaty Council

In June 1974, while the Pine Ridge reservation was still suffering from the after effects of Wounded Knee and the failure to remove Dick Wilson from power, members of ninety-eight indigenous nations from around the country, along with a number of governmental representatives from various countries, convened a meeting on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota. The meeting created the International Indian Treaty Council, a separate organization from the American Indian Movement, but one deeply influenced by the connections. The IITC in the Declaration of Continuing Independence outlined its plans, which centered upon seeking recognition from the United Nations for indigenous issues and seeking to uphold indigenous sovereignty.[10]

Modern Indian Nations (New York: Norton, 2006); or Jessica R. Cattelino, *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) among many others.

[9] See the final chapter of Colleen M. O'Neill, *Working the Navajo Way: Labor and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Paperback edition (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2013) for a good overview of "modernity" in relation to Native Americans and capitalism in the twentieth century.

[10] Declaration found within "Past, Present, and Future," American Indian Movement publication, 12-13. An earlier version of the pamphlet can be accessed here,

The formation of the new organization marked a monumental moment in Native activism. While indigenous people had always engaged in international diplomacy, the IITC was the first large-scale coordinated effort by activists in the second half of the twentieth century to move into the international arena. While there were copious issues at home, many Native Americans saw the IITC as a critical change, with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, an activist-academic who worked with the International Indian Treaty Council, going so far as to write later that, "The movement was saved largely by its decision to embrace, insist on, and apply international human rights law."[11] While groups such as the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) had secured victories in the decades prior to the 1970s, the federal government's active attempt to undermine the American Indian Movement through legal proceedings and the illegal COINTELPRO program of spying "nearly crushed the indigenous movement in the United States."[12]

The IITC rooted its complaints against the United States in historical treaties as well as recent UN declarations. Invoking UN General Assembly Resolution 1514, which included the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the IITC claimed the US was in violation of UN resolutions because it did not

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https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5564875fe4b0a715f94b3b42/t/558850b7e4b010cd4058b0d6/1434996919389/AIMPastPresentFuture.pdf. Accessed May 19th, 2018.

[11] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "How Indigenous Peoples Wound Up at the United Nations," in Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 115.

[12] Ibid., 115; See Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1990) for additional information the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) as it relates to AIM as well as other organizations.

"transfer all powers to the peoples of those territories, without any conditions or reservations."[13] The IITC planned to challenge US policies with a multi-point program that involved seeking membership in various international bodies, including OPEC, the World Health Organization, International Court of Justice, and UNESCO among others. Additionally, as with other indigenous activism of the period, the organization planned to send the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie to various nations and request that "those nations officially recognize said treaty['s] place in their archives of international agreements."[14] Yet, as with others who embraced the Treaty of Fort Laramie, the legal position was at times dubious. While utilizing the treaty highlighted the violations in regards to the Black Hills and the sovereignty of the Sioux, it was only one treaty. As John Trudell, who served as executive director of AIM during the 1970s, noted, "Now we need an international treaty, not just the 1868 treaty."[15]

A critical part of the IITC was moving away from the "action" mentality of the American Indian Movement and towards a policy-based response to indigenous issues. Even though Russell Means attended and spoke on June 14th saying that decisions "coming out of this conference are also going to be involved in the spilling of blood" and people needed to commit, "even if we need to shoot a white man," those organizing the

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[13] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514, December 14, 1960, quoted in "Red Paper," The Second International Indian Treaty Conference, June 13-20, 1976. Finzel Papers, Box 21, Folder 4, 11.

[14] "Red Paper," The Second International Indian Treaty Conference, June 13-20, 1976. Finzel Papers, Box 21, Folder 4, 18.

[15] "10 June 1974 Meeting of International Workgroup on Treaties." Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 21.

formal discussions sought to distance themselves from the rhetoric.[16] Three days earlier, Julie Bellafonte argued that the media was not covering the conference because they wanted an incident and AIM to be "a bunch of renegade Indians." Yet the IITC did not need an incident like Wounded Knee, the proceeding would speak for itself.[17] Furthermore, the IITC was centered upon providing an intellectual exchange, working to translate information from the United Nations to local communities and inversely ensuring those local communities had a voice on the international stage. Bill Means, in the proposal for the 1981 NGO conference on Indigenous Peoples and the Land, wrote that after informing the international community about treaty issues, the next major goal of the movement was "to bring information and concerns of the international community back to the various Indian Nations."[18] The end result of the IITC's campaign was that in 1977 the organization received status at the United Nations as a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) with Consultative Status within the the Geneva-based Economic and Social Council, the first indigenous group to achieve that status.[19]

Right after securing NGO status, the IITC served as the sole organizer of the 1977 Geneva Conference on Indians of the Americas, sponsored by the Commission on Human Rights' sub-committee on Racism and De-colonization. The conference sought to

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[16] Russell Means Speech at International Indian Treaty Council, June 14, 1974. Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee Records. Minnesota Historical Society, Box 94.

[17] "11 June 1974 Meeting of International Workgroup on Treaties." Robert Robideau Papers, Box 2, Folder 21.

[18] "A Proposal for International NGO Conference 'Indigenous Peoples and Their Land'" Raul Salinas Papers, University of Stanford Special Collections, Box 32, Folder 4.

[19] "About IITC," International Indian Treaty Council, https://www.iitc.org/about-iitc/. Accessed February 22, 2018.

bring together indigenous leaders from around the western hemisphere which the Treaty Council hoped would ultimately lead to getting the United Nations "on our side on issues of treaty rights and sovereignty so that we can begin to negotiate with the U.S. on a more equal basis."[20] In working around the "criminals" of the U.S. government who had continually exploited them, IITC members wanted to find support among nations who had been exploited by the U.S. in the same manner. Ed Castillo stated in one treaty working group meeting that Third World nations "in a world court will understand our plight since they have been ripped off by US oil companies, etc.," and the Treaty Council provided sustained support throughout the 1970s to Mapuche Indians in Chile responding to governmental policies imposed by U.S.-backed Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.[21] The conference increased the standing of the IITC, both within the U.N. and with indigenous peoples around the western hemisphere and pushed for a more comprehensive accounting of indigenous issues within the U.N.

The development of the IITC came during a period that the United Nations had declared the "Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination" and in 1972 commissioned a report, "Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations," to explore the issues. The report provided a detailed, albeit uneven account of the issues related to indigenous peoples and added international support for the movement. While commissioned in 1972, the report lingered in an unfinished status for much of the 1970s. The first half of the report, written between 1973 and 1975 takes on a

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[20] *Treaty Council News,* April 1977. Roger Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 21.

[21] Ibid.; *Treaty Council News*, November 1977.

very different appearance from the second half written after 1978. The first half is characterized as "dry and legalistic" and paternalistic as the writers did not consult with indigenous peoples.[22] The second half, coming after the 1977 Geneva summit on indigenous peoples, incorporated material from those indigenous activists as well as many of the NGOs that were involved in documenting the issues throughout the decade.

Even though the conference created discussion on indigenous issues and was well attended, it did not resolve the fundamental issue for the IITC, which was the countries from which the group should seek support. Jimmie Durham, who resided in Europe during the Red Power Era, was instrumental in organizing activism at the international level. While some within the IITC wished to seek representation with OPEC as a way of increasing control of their natural resources, others highlighted the hypocritical nature of the effort. Ed Castillo argued that nothing would be gained from "Arab or Eastern princes" who oppressed their poorest people. As a result, the IITC would be left to seek support from the smallest countries and align itself with countries that would put it in direct conflict with conservative elements in American foreign policy. In particular, the IITC would look to gain support of the Non-Aligned Movement, comprised of countries from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. While not tied to either side of the Cold War, the NAM came under criticism of conservatives in the United States as an alleged communist front, with opponents noting the presence of Cuba in the group as well as the Soviet Union's support for many NAM goals. Criticisms of both the Non-Aligned Movement and indigenous activities at the United Nations increased with the election of Ronald

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[22] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "How Indigenous Peoples Wound Up at the United Nations," in *Hidden 1970s*, 122.

Reagan in 1980. At the same time that the IITC worked to organize a follow-up conference in 1981 on Indigenous Peoples and the Land. The conference saw attendance by 134 indigenous representatives, down from close to two-hundred representatives in 1977, which Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz attributes partly to the Reagan Administration call to boycott the conference.[23] The dilemma of how to situate itself internationally was only part of the issue facing the IITC. In the United States, the IITC and AIM were also uncertain of which groups provided the best avenues for support.

Native Activism and the Realignment of the 1970s

An "AIM Fact Sheet" distributed by the American Indian Defense Committee (AID) that claimed AIM "represents a fact of Indian life, but is a leader of the radical left as well." The sheet went on to note that AIM is looked to for guidance by "the Left and Third World groups" and quoted Russell Means as saying, "If the labor movement had looked to us in the 30's, perhaps they would not have lost."[24] As noted, AIM pulled in a considerable amount of support from non-Natives, especially within leftist groups. In the years that followed the occupation of Wounded Knee, some of the groups began to debate their relationship with the movement. In the Bay Area a support committee of

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[23] "International NGO Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the Land," International Indian Treaty Council Report. Finzel Papers, Box 11, Folder 16; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "How Indigenous Peoples Wound Up at the United Nations," in Ibid., 126.

[24] Finzel Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. There is no additional information on AID in the archival materials. Searches for information on the group turns up a minimal amount of information. Materials at the Pennsylvania Historical Society links it potentially to the United American Indians of the Delaware Valley (UAIDV), an Indian led group. Russell Means spoke in Philadelphia in April 1974 at an event discussing Wounded Knee that was sponsored by AID. See *The Militant*, April 26, 1974, 2. Accessed from https://www.themilitant.com/1974/3816/MIL3816.pdf. A finding aid for the UAIDV archives at the Pennsylvania Historical Society can be found at http://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/findingaid3048uaidv.pdf.

non-Natives felt the critical issue was "the lack of any kind of theoretical statement being issued from the Native Peoples providing the basis for support work." Invoking Mao's statement that "without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolution," the discussion arrived at the idea that not only did AIM need a revolutionary ideology, it needed to recognize "a class struggle is a matter of class struggle—a fundamental Marxist-Leninist principle;" otherwise, a new movement had to replace AIM.[25]

The writer went on to comment that a recent trip to Washington D.C. by a group of tribal leaders failed because it was "totally lacking in historical and revolutionary class perspective," which meant it was only going to result in "more frustration, division, disunity and more errors." Furthermore, according to the author, even though the group tied itself to the defense of those involved in Wounded Knee, that "outburst of resistance" followed in a long history "proven to be errors with the advent of the Paris Commune of 1871, not to mention Wounded Knee." Until AIM realized it needed to lead a class struggle against the unified enemy capitalism rather than a "race war," the members of the Bay Area Support Committee would be wasting their time and energy, according to the author.[26]

The paternalistic approach to the movement had no focus on the issue of indigenous sovereignty, replacing that long-held aim with a mass proletarian struggle, a point expanded on by Len Cavise of Chicago, in letter to the Native American Support Committee (NASC), an alliance of non-Native lawyers and legal experts, in November of

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[25] "Notes from a friend for political discussion: 11/7/75, Barbara," Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

[26] "Notes from a friend for political discussion: 11/7/75, Barbara," Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

1975 that was distributed at that month's meeting and deemed "helpful for political discussions." While another letter writer expressed unease about bringing their politics into the "'Indian' struggle," Cavise argued "the most serious failing of we non-Indian legal workers has been that we did not struggle with the Indian leadership around political ideas or that we had no political ideas about the struggle to put forth."[27] Cavise added that those people who had travelled to Wounded Knee and kept quiet about politics had simply been "guilt tripped" into not saying anything even though "The Indian struggle is clearly an anti-imperialist struggle that is just as clearly *our* struggle. (emphasis in original)" Instead, according to Cavise, those in attendance had failed to provide guidance, creating the situation of AIM's leadership being "as screwed up and confused as it is." Cavise also invoked one of the most common complaints leveled against AIM—the idea that they were not really Indians. Utilizing Stalin's definition of nationhood presented the fact that "The Indians in the city are not a nation at all but a national minority entitled to full democratic rights in the larger society" and meant that more research was needed "before coming to a final theoretical position."[28] Yet, Cavise also expressed ambivalence about "Soviet social-imperialism" invading the movement

[27] Len Cavise letter to BAWKSC, November 11, 1975, Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

[28] Len Cavise letter to BAWKSC, November 11, 1975, Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 3. Stalin's definition required groups to meet five requirements: "historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on a basis of common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." Cavise does not explain why Indians do not meet the requirement, arguing instead regional autonomy "much like the Chicano peoples of the Southwest" is the correct option.

because of Clyde Bellecourt's position on the Committee of the National Alliance, a Communist Party-allied group.[29]

The discussions with the BAWKSC and the NASC arose in 1975 because both groups, comprised of lawyers to assist with the legal ramifications of the occupation of Wounded Knee, were reaching the end of their initial commitment made in June 1973 to provide support for the post-Wounded Knee trials. In undated meeting minutes, members of the NASC outlined potential questions for continuing support for AIM. The group's members outlined three questions to decide on for potentially continuing legal support: do they support only groups they fully agree with, do they support groups advocating progressive politics but they do not fully support, or do they support groups seeking civil rights regardless of the politics of the group. Depending on the answers, the group could then discuss whether to provide legal support but withhold endorsement of the politics. Yet, the end result of the meeting was that "this is not the best way of determining whether we should lend legal support because AIM doesn't have a political line that can coherently be inspected."[30] Ignoring the inclusion of indigenous issues under the "civil rights" banner, the outline of the NASC shows a higher level of ambivalence to insert their own politics into the movement, yet, coming a year after the formation of the IITC, there is no discussion of supporting the international turn in native activism outside of amorphous endorsements of supporting anti-imperialist groups.

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[29] Ibid. Cavise writes that Bellecourt's membership in the committee was "not because of personal ideology but because of his position that AIM will accept help from anywhere."

[30] Untitled meeting notes beginning with "George, I will send out copies…", Finzel Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

While these voices comprised a relatively small part of those who supported Native issues during the period, the Bay Area was one of the main hubs of support for indigenous issues prior to Wounded Knee and has remained the same following it. The Bay Area Support Committee additionally operated in one of the major urban Native American populations, and the discussions should not be discounted. Furthermore, the NASC received the endorsement of the IITC, albeit with the note that the organization had its issues, in November 1977 for their work building ties to solidarity groups in Europe.[31] Writing on the countercultural support for Native Americans during the 1960s, Sherry Smith argued that non-native support had its limitations but countercultural individuals supported natives "in large and significant numbers, which, in turn, caught the attention of the rest of the nation." According to Smith, the Hippie "discovery" of Native Americans went beyond previous critiques of superficial and marginal because it provided a fundamental shift in indigenous issues.[32] Yet just over two years after Wounded Knee, liberal supporters were already seeking to impose their views and ideas on the movement under the guise of support.

Furthermore, these sorts of discussions played out within the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee (WKLDOC), which was created to provide direct legal assistance to AIM's members following Wounded Knee. WKLDOC provided the lawyers and coordinated the legal effort for both Dennis Banks and Russell Means, the two most prominent members of AIM to stand trial after the occupation, and succeeded

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[31] *Treaty Council News*, November 1977.

[32] Sherry L. Smith, *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6-7.

in getting them both acquitted of federal charges. In late 1974, Bob Anderson, a leader within WKLDOC, wrote a memo to all members arguing that they were "no longer objects of history books but the makers of history." Anderson's letter opened with a discussion of how liberation fighters in Mozambique paused daily to read Mao's quotations, which provided both direction and guidance. AIM, however, was not in a position to forcibly retake what had been taken from them, so until that time, the movement "will have to fight our way through the maze of an economic-social operating world-wide to oppress people for the benefit of a few in Europe and America." Anderson is very explicitly aligning at least the WKLDOC with the larger liberation movement in the Third World and pushing for AIM to move in that direction as well. Yet, in Anderson's view two big issues were hindering that shift: the individualistic nature of both members of the committee and AIM's leaders; and the inability of AIM to comprehend economic theories and lead people to try and "look-alike the middle class" instead of solving actual problems.[33]

Letters to WKLDOC included many that invoked economic and political struggles of various groups. While the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Clinic's letter during the occupation argued "our enemy is the same…the dog-eat-dog profit system…" and the Vietnam Committee for Solidarity with American People that claimed the same people who sought to undermine AIM carried out crimes against the Vietnamese and could "only checked by the struggle and we hope that you will succeed" utilized political

[33] "Letter to All of US from Bob Anderson," 10/22/1974. WKLDOC Records, Box 19.

rhetorical, many simply sought information.[34] Furthermore, the group gained attention in Europe, yet in contrast to other historians who claim the international support for AIM/WKLDOC helped it succeed, the committee's records indicate an overwhelming number of superficial correspondence including things like seeking pen pals with "noble peoples."[35] International solidarity and forming an ideological basis were critical components for many within the organization; yet, the reality at times was less successful, WKLDOC at one point was over $12,000 in debt.[36]

Both the WKLDOC and the Bay Area support group remained active through the rest of the decade and into the 1980s, and the debates gave credence to opposition from Native activists about aligning with liberal supporters. Writing in *Treaty Council News*, the official publication of the IITC, Jimmie Durham noted indigenous activism pulled in considerable support from non-Native leftists. Yet, Durham found the support a bigger issue than a benefit because the "freaks" added nothing substantial and were "hippies who just rip us off."[37] Instead, Durham proposed the much more effective way of gaining support from non-natives was through the white working class (coal miners, farmers,

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[34] Unsigned letter from Alabama (Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Clinic) and Letter from the Vietnam Committee for Solidarity with American People to Medical Aid to Indochina, July 1973. WKLDOC Records, Box 96.

[35] Grace Borowicz Letter from Poland, 1/30/75. WKLDOC Records, Box 95. In particular, György Ference Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty Between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016) claims European support was critical during the period. In contrast the correspondence boxes in the WKLDOC are largely comprised of letters from the United States rather than Europe. It is also difficult to compute donations totals between the two and provide a quantitative accounting of the organization's funding sources.

[36] Letter to Ann Shubert (Alberta Indian Education Center), August 1974. WKLDOC Records, Box 95.

[37] *Treaty Council News*, August 1978, 4.

steelworkers) who had legitimate political power in the United States. Durham's invocation of the working class is interesting because even though the early 1970s appeared to be fostering a re-energized working class, Durham's statements came right as the "workingman's era" began to descend into the more conservative Reagan Era. The conflict over which non-Native groups and demographics to align with, however, emphasizes the attempts of burgeoning international indigenous activism to fit within a decade historian Jefferson Cowie labelled "more than a time of mere fads…it was a time of fundamental realignments."[38]

At the same time, AIM organized the Longest Walk, one of the few points of Native activism post-1973 to be covered in any major detail and generally seen as the final coda in AIM's history. The group organized a march from Alcatraz to Washington, D.C., meant to protest anti-Indian bills introduced into Congress.[39] Begun in February 1978, the movement arrived in D.C. in July 1978 and staged a week of protests and ceremonies. In their official information pamphlet, AIM notes that "none of the anti-treaty bills became law," and "just days after the arrival of the walkers, Congress passed,

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[38] Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2012), 3, 11.

[39] One of the most prominent bills to draw attention of Native activists was the Native Americans Equal Opportunity Act (H.R. 9054, H.R. 13329), introduced to Congress by Washington Republican representative John Cunningham (Seattle) first introduced in September 1977. The bill would have reapplied policies of Termination, which sought to end the government-to-government replacement between the United States and Native American tribes. The bill never advanced farther than a committee referral and Cunningham, who was elected in a special election after the incumbent resigned to serve as Carter's Transportation Secretary, lost re-election the following cycle. George Castile argues that Cunningham's bill along with anti-Indian bills by Washington's Senator Slade Gorton and Representative Lloyd Meeds were "largely introduced for home-state consumption" to build on the Washingtonian backlash to native fishing rights victories. Castile, *Taking Charge*, 47-48.

and President Carter signed, the Indian Religious Freedom Act and the Indian Child Welfare Act later that year."[40] In contrast, the January 1978 issue of *Treaty Council News* included a front page story entitled "Distraction: Another U.S. Tactic" and stated that the Treaty Council followed the advice of elders to move away from working to change the U.S. governmental response to native peoples, because "we would not fall into the trap of dealing with Congress or with congressional acts in any way. We declared that, as nations and peoples, we would deal with the U.S. only through its State Department." Spending time trying to fight bills divided the movement away from the more important purpose of finally building a liberation struggle that would gain solid international support. Instead, activists "want us to drop all that work which will really get us somewhere and go back to twenty years ago and a dead-end fight with congress."[41] Jimmie Durham was ambivalent about the protest, arguing it was just a way for people to get their names in the press, and it took away energy from serious work "to fight some bills that had already been killed."[42]

Durham's objection to the Longest Walk put the international faction, or at least its leader, in conflict with the most prominent Native activist organization in the United States. The conflict also manifested the criticism of the IITC that it ignored reservation issues and failed to secure victories in its international work. In response, the December 1977 *Treaty Council News* recapped the work of the IITC over the past year and the

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[40] "Past, Present, and Future," American Indian Movement publication, 19.

[41] *Treaty Council News*, January 1978, Kay Cole Papers, Box 9, Folder 2.

[42] "Trying to See Clearly," *Treaty Council News*, August 1978, 2; Kay Cole Papers, Box 9, Folder 2.

agenda forthcoming in 1978. The report noted that while many of the events on the international level seemed remote to the "day to day survival" of Native Americans across the United States, it was critical to work to undue the centuries of colonization. The report went on to address those who were "disillusioned" with the progress of the IITC, arguing that undoing the wide reach of colonization took time while conceding the IITC "did not know exactly what we were getting into, or where it might lead us."[43]

Part of Durham's opposition to AIM-organized protests may have arisen from the fact that he saw AIM and others as opportunistic, at least when it came to international work. In the same editorial that criticized the Longest Walk as a waste of time, Durham stated that when the IITC was laying the groundwork prior to the 1977 Geneva Conference few people wanted to get involved. Then after the conference, "everybody and his brother was jumping on the bandwagon," with most of them out for their own ends rather than a comprehensive response to the issues raised.[44] One of those groups Durham's called out by name was AIM, which he said jumped on the international movement to gain funding for their survival schools in Minneapolis. In the end, for Durham, the Longest Walk "drained a lot of time and money that could have been better spent" and showed that "It's easier to demonstrate in Washington than it is to do solid work on the reservation."[45] At the same time, in California Dennis Banks felt as if history was passing him by, having to watch the Longest Walk depart the state as he could not

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[43] *The Treaty Council News*, December 1977.

[44] Durham also pointed towards the Iroquois Confederacy who sought "support for their struggle at the expense of unity," and people like Selo Black Crow (an Oglala activist involved in religious freedom issues) "just to be bigshots." *Treaty Council News,* August 1978.

[45] *Treaty Council News*, August 1978, 4.

leave the state due to state charges in South Dakota. Banks, along with many of those involved in the Longest Walk and the IITC would continue these discussions into the 1980s and build on them in response to the election of Ronald Reagan.[46]

"Warrior Scholars" and the Response to Reagan

Ronald Reagan's sweeping victory over incumbent Jimmy Carter in 1980 on a platform rooted in reducing government spending, cutting taxes, and reducing what he called the "tenancies of excessive government regulation" marked a pivotal shift in the politics of the United States.[47] Native Americans immediately faced the very real threat of cuts to funding that provided critical health, educational, and housing services to both reservation-based and urban Indian communities. The new policies presented an issue for Native Americans, and many felt they required an immediate response to protect the critical funding. As a result, Native activists sought to increase publicity for the situation by organizing an unofficial impeachment proceeding against Reagan that would put the president on trial for crimes against Native Americans. Yet, even though the conservative turn in American politics brought supporters together, the "impeachment" quickly morphed into an all-encompassing event to put the United States on trial for crimes against Indigenous peoples regardless of whether or not they lived in the United States. The American Indian International Tribunal (AIIT) in the early 1980s at D-Q University in Davis, California, created a Native-led version of the Fourth Russell Tribunal, held in Rotterdam, Netherlands, that sought to informally adjudicate Indigenous human rights

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[46] "Afternoon Session," Dennis Banks Statement, American Indian International Tribunal planning meetings. Kay Cole Papers, Box 9, Folder 1.

[47] Castile, *Taking Charge*, 49.

claims and bring pressure against governments to change the policies. The AIIT serves as a helpful case study in how activists attempted to continue the international turn of the 1970s and bring international attention to issues that affected Native Americans at both the national and local levels..[48]

In April 1982 activists congregated at D-Q to discuss a preliminary response to the Reagan Administration's new programs. The meeting led to the creation of the AIIT and planning would continue through September. One of the first issues before the planning committee was finding a location for the proceeding. Located in Davis, California, just west of Sacramento, D-Q University seemed like the obvious choice as it grew out of an activist movement led by professors in the Native American Studies program at University of California-Davis, as well as Indigenous and Latinx students who saw themselves as under-represented in Davis's administrative structure and felt that education should be controlled by the individual groups. Situated on a decommissioned military base, the founders secured the plot of land after an occupation protest resulted in the University of California withdrawing an application for the land. While UC-Davis had argued the site would be used for the Native American Studies program, it would also serve as a research facility, which D-Q founders argued would be controlled by "larger private corporations, motivated by the infamous publish or perish threat, and

[48] D-Q University was named for the Aztec God Quetzalcoatl and the formal name of the Great Peacemaker, the founder of the Haudenosaunee confederacy. While the university regularly used its fully name in communications, traditionally the Great Peacemaker's formal name is avoided. As such I will use D-Q University throughout.

performed without regard to human benefits or ecological consequences." In contrast, research on the campus was meant to "enhance rather than degrade Mother Earth."[49]

Jack Forbes, Kenneth Martin, and David Risling, all D-Q founders, authored a report that looked at the ways in which the establishment of the institution was the best example of an Indigenous-Chicano partnership and the benefits it had for both communities. In their view, not only was the formation of the university one of the "most significant" steps in building Indigenous education, but its creation marked "the first 'Pan-Indian' movement (cutting across tribal lines and national boundaries) which expressed real success" that also potentially being the first "worker-peasant-intellectual" which embraced "the conditions and lives of the common people."[50] The writers went on to note that the university would expand on the creation of the Native American Studies program at nearby University of California-Davis, which, while an important milestone, was created because of "the temporary fear and guilt…induced by several 'Third World' student strikes and by student militancy" and quickly lost power with administrators.[51]

The conflicts with UC-Davis were mirrored by the Davis community at-large, which had a large "white liberal" population that had provided support in the past but,

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[49] "D-Q University," Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, 1.

[50] Jack D. Forbes, Kenneth R. Martin, David Risling, "The Establishment of D-Q University: An Example of Successful Indian-Chicano Community Development," undated publication, Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, unnumbered introduction. D-Q University should also be examined in comparison to the Survival Schools, elementary level schools formed by the American Indian Movement in Minneapolis during the 1970s. While locally focused, the Survival Schools offered Spanish language courses and fostered hemispheric identity. See Bob Gregory, "Task Force Report," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, 7; See Julie L. Davis, *Survival Schools: The American Indian Movement and Community Education in the Twin Cities* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) for a detailed examination of the schools.

[51] "The Establishment of D-Q University," 2.

according to the authors, responded to the founding of D-Q mostly with either indifference or hostility, further highlighting the need for movements led and organized by indigenous peoples themselves.[52] Furthermore, much of the support found within the community came from the lower classes, with the authors reporting only a handful of white professors and students moving to actively support the new institution.[53] While the founders mostly focused on relations with non-Natives, the university's creation did underline divides within Indigenous activism. While historians have elaborated on the importance of the occupation of Alcatraz by the Indians of All Tribes between 1969 and 1971, D-Q's founders explicitly founded the University with an activist mentality, they sought to differentiate it from the Alcatraz approach.[54] Many of those who took part in the earlier incident arrived ready to support the initial D-Q protests in 1971, but many were "unaware of the history" of conflict within the UC-Davis community and sought a process rooted in "liberation" and amorphous "Indian rights" that would create an "inland Alcatraz" rather than more established procedures and a formal university the students of UC-Davis were attempting to implement.[55] Rather than creating a new Alcatraz, the founders hoped to promote "warrior scholars" who would form alliances across racial and political lines, in the process posing a "tremendous threat because immediately the bonds

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[52] "The Establishment of D-Q University," 3.

[53] "The Establishment of D-Q University," 5. It should be noted that the authors go on to note that support for the new institution was minimal regardless of race. Support from both the African American and Asian communities are listed as minimal in the report.

[54] See Troy R. Johnson, *The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Red Power and Self-Determination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008) for a comprehensive account of the occupation.

[55] "The Establishment of D-Q University," 6, 7.

of colonialism in the colonialized mind begin to be broken."[56] In other words, while the founders wanted a more formalized structure, they also founded a university rooted in an activist mentality. This in many respects became the primary selling point, as educational institutions such as the Navajo Community College preceded D-Q and provided a more institutionalized educational environment. The activist mindset is best emphasized by the fact that the institution selected Dennis Banks as chancellor in 1979. Banks, who both took courses and taught at the school, served as the university's only chancellor in its history and emphasized a program rooted in traditional Indian ceremonies.[57]

Even though D-Q University was far less formal than a traditional university, the Ad-Hoc Committee on Indian Education that formed during the planning of the AIIT argued that D-Q was the surest way to counter funding issues related to Reagan's presidency, and the university would provide a pathway out of poverty and ensure Native American youth were not transformed into "ignorant technicians."[58] Forbes built on this idea in testimony at the AIIT when he stated D-Q was a way of checking the transformation of indigenous peoples "into proletariats, either rural or urban cheap labor working classes," making them forget their indigenous heritage and converting them into "part of a color-graded racial caste system."[59] D-Q would provide a venue for both building collations and re-affirming separate identities.

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[56] Jack Forbes testimony at the American Indian International Tribunal, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 16, 3, 6.

[57] Banks, 322-323

[58] "Statement on Education," Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 3.

[59] Jack Forbes testimony at the American Indian International Tribunal, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 16, 11-12.

As one of the only tribal colleges not affiliated with a tribal nation and the location of an emergency meeting to create an initial response to Reagan administration policies in April 1982, D-Q University seemed like a decent place to hold the AIIT. But the question of location was not immediately resolved in the planning discussions. Phillip Deer argued for Washington D.C., noting "all problems come from there." Other participants were concerned about the potentially fleeting attention anything in D.C. would receive, undoubtedly remembering the attention the Trail of Broken Treaties received in 1972. Herb Powless argued that "Washington has too many issues which will detract from our issue. Only one day coverage."[60] In contrast, D-Q University offered connections to the indigenous community and the ability of Dennis Banks to take part; Banks was still using California Governor Jerry Brown's support to avoid charges related to South Dakota's state charges related to Wounded Knee. The university won out and would host the tribunal in September 1982, which it subsequently used to promote itself as a place to counter tours by various military and government officials who regularly spoke on conservative issues that had serious potential implications for indigenous and minority peoples.[61]

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[60] The Trail of Broken Treaties was a protest that sought to present a list of demands to the Nixon Administration and ended with the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building for a week prior to the 1972 presidential election. The best analysis of what the protest was seeking still remains Vine Deloria, *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence*, 1st University of Texas Press ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); a historical overview of the protest can be found in Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*.

[61] "D-Q University," Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, 2.

The Scope of the American Indian International Tribunal

Besides location, the organizers discussed to what extent the tribunal should be centered on Ronald Reagan's new policies versus crimes of the United States as a whole. Originally prompted to convene as a result of New Federalism policies, the organizers thought that confining the discussion to Reagan alone would be less effective because Reagan was only part of the problem. Russell Means argued for a more expansive meeting that would move beyond just exposing Ronald Reagan's policies. In the typed notes from the planning meetings, Means argued that the real issues were "sovereignty, economics…Reagan's aspect [as] puppet of corporation[s]."[62] Powless, however, cautioned restraint and noted AIM had its issues with thinking too big. According to Powless, the weakness of AIM was that the organization "always goes into it, before we know it we are attacking the universe," and that "we came here to repeal Reaganomics and we're not international. Need to come out of our communities…." The international idea ultimately won the day, and Means threw a satirical apology towards the others for "acting white——making something complicated which is not complicated. Propose we have International Tribunal, and lets get on with it."[63] The divergence between Means and Powless over the scope of the tribunal indicates that even after a decade of activism by the IITC and support for moving towards an international focus by the leaders of AIM, a level of concern still remained within Indian Country that significant local issues would be obscured and forgotten by an ill-defined international aspect.

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[62] "Tribunal location discussion, 4/21/82," Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

[63] Ibid.

The divide over the scope of the tribunal would be evident in the fact that the proceeding would have an international focus, including multiple days of internationally-focused testimony, but would conclude with a day of testimonies by U.S. interests that would remain rooted in the original issues of New Federalism and Reagan's move to scale back the federal government. Building upon comments by Philip Deer, Russell Means embraced an idea of blissful ignorance, arguing that if Indigenous peoples returned to more traditional ways, Reagan would be nothing more than a name. Amazingly, Means maintained that "Educated Indians are screaming over Reaganomics. The elders don't mention cutbacks. They don't know who Reagan is."[64] Means's comments exemplify his particular mindset that emphasized unrealistic proclamations and put him at odds with a number of Native leaders over the years. They highlight the uneven nature of a movement that had the potential to follow outlandish ideas in the name of progress.

While Means proclaimed ignorance, those in attendance at the planning meetings agreed Reagan would be bad for Native peoples, but there was talk that the new policies might actually be a long-term victory for indigenous peoples. Dennis Banks, opening the April 1982 meetings, emphasized that the activists sought to challenge Reagan and the federal government as a whole, but he claimed they should "oppose termination of these programs but also realize the need to get off the addiction and become self-sufficient."[65] Bill Means, Russell's brother and a member of AIM and the IITC, extended thanks to

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Health Workshop notes, 4/21/82, Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 2.

Reagan in his later tribunal testimony for "making our people realize that the hand that feeds you can be drawn back at any time. We thank you for helping our people realize that they must become active, that they must become involved, in order to take their place in society…"[66] According to Bill Means, Reagan's policies spurred "the red man of the Western Hemisphere" to emerge onto the world stage during the 1980s in the same way blacks and Arabs emerged in the 1960s and 1970s respectively.[67] Or, to put it more succinctly, Dennis Banks simply said, "First get rid of him [Reagan], then we'll thank him."[68]

Yet, the policies that the Reagan Administration sought to curtail, particularly in regards to funding for health services, were threatening to have serious implications for Native Americans around the country. The members of the tribunal, while acknowledging this, had difficulty bringing themselves to support many of the policies they wanted to save from the administration. In particular Banks focused on Indian hospitals, claiming they could not be de-coupled from support from large corporations and statements supporting the clinics were tantamount to saying "save Bayer, save Exxon." In Banks' view, the meetings needed to issue firm statements opposing European medicine because "those clinics are killing us."[69] When other members of the

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[66] Bill Means, testimony before the American Indian International Tribunal, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 22, 21.

[67] Bill Means, testimony before the American Indian International Tribunal, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 22, 10.

[68] "Dennis Banks opened up the session April 20 with a prayer and a song," Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

[69] Health Workshop notes, 4/21/82, Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 1.

working group tried to argue that getting rid of Indian hospitals would cause serious issues for people who could not afford any other options, Banks responded that while the removal of "European" medicine would "cause suffering…we must do it."[70] The changes would present issues, potentially for close to two decades according to many in attendance, but it would wake up Indians who had previously been opposed to AIM or other "militants" because "When we sit down at the table with our children and there is no food, then we will see who becomes militant."[71] Philip Deer echoed some of the same sentiments, stating, "People are too comfortable. They talk about termination but it's gonna take termination to wake people up."[72] Nevertheless, those in attendance had to understand the callousness of the discussion, and the end result would be a statement arguing for continued support of Indian hospitals with control resting with tribes rather than the federal government.

The role of corporations in the health industry stresses one of the central organizing aspects of the tribunal, not only trying Reagan for his issues but also the role of the U.S. and its corporations in exploiting indigenous peoples around the world. The organizing committee settled on a guiding principle of examining "the economic effects of U.S. foreign and domestic policies and their impact on Indigenous lands and peoples."[73] In a funding proposal for the tribunal, the organizers note that the tribunal

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[70] Health Workshop notes, 4/21/82, Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 2.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Phillip Deer, planning committee transcript, 4/20/1982, Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 5.

[73] "Proposal for Funding, June 30, 1982, to The Funding Exchange," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

would be run by indigenous peoples but would not be exclusively indigenous, because "It has long been believed and accepted that other racial groups are equally concerned with the domestic and [foreign] policies of the U.S., and have taken various stands on those issues which directly affect their communities."[74] Furthermore, Banks had already reached out to organizations in Europe and South and Central America. The ultimate goal would be to expose the issues with the United States' foreign and domestic policies and by issuing the ruling to the general public that would theoretically generate "worldwide concern…to achieve" changes to the policies.[75] After the first day of the tribunal, which would cover issues of multi-national companies and "money changers," the subsequent days would be divided into testimonies by individuals and groups from Africa/Middle East, Asia/Pacific Islands, Central/South America, and North America respectively.

Over the six months between the original meetings in April and the tribunal in September, members sent out material seeking groups and organizations to testify against the United States as well as promoting the event to various mailing lists and organizations. While testimonies would come from indigenous groups around the world, Dennis Banks received various letters from non-Indigenous individuals around the U.S. and the world adding support to the tribunal. At the same time the letters highlight that the scope of the promotion, the letters also showcase many of the same superficial responses that made support for the IITC uneven. Many were from non-Natives offering support, but also having minimal understanding of indigenous issues, many times

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[74] "Proposal for Funding" from the First American Indian International Tribunal to The Funding Exchange, June 30, 1982, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, 1.

[75] "Proposal for Funding, June 30, 1982, to The Funding Exchange," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

providing rambling discussions of their claimed indigeneity and how the U.S. government had wronged them. Nevertheless, the tribunal did provide some interesting alliances of minority groups. In one case, a nineteen-year-old resident of South Tyrol, a majority German-speaking region of Italy, wrote to Dennis Banks in August 1982 to note that the experiences of Native Americans in the United States had opened her up to issues of colonization at home. She noted that she was an "apple," utilizing a pejorative term for an Indian who acted white, because she had more Italian friends and had adopted much of the Italian language but she was rediscovering her identity.[76]

Multi-National Corporations and Exploitations

The first event at the tribunal after the opening sunrise ceremony was a presentation by Holly Sklar, a non-indigenous writer speaking on the issues of multi-national corporations and their ability to exploit and degrade communities around the world. Sklar, who had written a book on the Trilateral Commission—an economic organization formed by David Rockefeller to build economic cooperation between the U.S., Western Europe, and Japan, laid out the case for corporations having much greater power than many Third World countries, leading much of the developing world to buy into the "'middle class' by mortgaging their peoples' futures."[77] In the U.S., the issues of corporations were overwhelmingly felt by Native Americans, with Sklar noting the issues of uranium and coal mining on reservations and the ability of corporations to control prices of goods available. While Sklar tackles issues focused on indigenous communities

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[76] Claudia[?], letter to Dennis Banks, August 1982, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

[77] "Summary of Testimony Presented by Holly Sklar 1st Session," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, 3.

both in the U.S. and overseas, the main point of her talk was not directly centered on indigenous issues. Nor was one of Russell Means' appearances before the tribunal in which he read testimony from a member of the Committee for Monetary Reform, a group which viewed the debt-based economic system as unsustainable. While Means seemed at times to have only a basic grasp of what he was reading, the significance for the tribunal was the idea that international banks utilized debt as a way of controlling smaller countries, but because Native Americans had little connection to the international economic scene, "they have used political destruction, genocide, assimilation" to control indigenous people.[78] Means noted in follow-up questioning that the issue of currency presented issues for Native Americans, but he also argued much of it was a diversion to keep people occupied. Buying into or opposing the system was simply a game, leaving people "arguing about Marxism vis-à-vis Trotskyism vis-à-vis imperialism. You can spin your wheels there, being the diversion that they want you to be, or you can get down to some very basic respect for your relatives."[79]

Much of the testimony by Sklar objecting to transnational corporations and the undue influence of banks, along with the guiding principal of opposing Reagan's policies, certainly seemed to place AIM and the tribunal in line with leftist ideologies. Yet many of the participants were hesitant to endorse the idea that the tribunal served as a partisan affair in terms of U.S. politics. The tribunal had to function on its own, as an indigenous event that drew in a variety of issues and fostered debates centering on Native

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[78] Russell Means Testimony, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 22, 19.

[79] Russell Means Question and Answer Period, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 22, 10.

Americans. Bill Means, in summarizing the proceedings, noted that the crimes against indigenous peoples were glaringly obvious, but the solution was not. He noted that, "No longer are Indigenous people accepting political ideologies which are European and merely a change in government but applying principles of traditional…governments which governed our peoples for thousands of years." Means jarringly concluded by both invoking Justice Robert Jackson's statement at the Nuremberg trials that the United States was "not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us," but also noting, in all caps, "IF YOU DON'T FUCK OFF WE'LL KILL YOU"[80] The message being that Indigenous issues deserved a place in the international political discourse, but Indigenous peoples were also separate from much of the politics that revolved around the movement. The tribunal, however, could not escape ties to the ongoing Cold War and the renewed hostilities brought about by Reagan's harsh stand against the Soviet Union. Bill Means, in discussing Reagan's claims about revolutions being exported from Cuba to Central America, argued the issue was simply "colonialism being exported." Means also noted issues with working with international communities, arguing that when Indians were on the international stage they were labelled the "first communists."[81] The dismissal of socialism/communism still remained a contentious issue for non-Native supporters.

Four months prior to Reagan's election, Russell Means gave his self-proclaimed "most famous speech" at the Black Hills International Survival Gathering. The gathering

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[80] Bill Means, "Summary of Tribunal," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 29.

[81] Bill Means, Testimony, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 22, 5, 13.

had been a partnership between the Black Hills Alliance, which comprised both AIM and peace movement activists, along with local white ranchers opposed to Black Hills development, with the goal of creating a dialog on stopping environmental exploitation. The most notable thing to come out of the gathering, however, was Means's speech entitled "For America to Live, Europe Must Die," which laid out his argument that Marxism was incompatible with Indigenous life. Instead of benefitting American Indians, it simply "changed power relations within Europe around a bit, but only to meet the needs of the white world at the expense of everyone and everything else."[82] Using the example of uranium, which was plentiful on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Means argued that capitalists would exploit the natural resources only as long as it was profitable, potentially buying indigenous peoples time should it not be worth the cost of mining. In contrast, Marxists, according to Means, sought the "perfection of the industrial process which is destroying us all." This would continue to foster the exploitation of Native resources while only redistributing the profits of the enterprise to a wider group of people. In other words, according to Means, Marxism has no place for distinct indigenous peoples; instead, if Natives wish to join the Marxist system, they need to assimilate and become proletarians. Means concluded the fiery speech by noting that his words and positions had long been twisted to make indigenous activism represent "Marxist-

[82] Means discusses the speech and its popularity in Russell Means and Marvin J Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 401-402. The speech is included in various archives including the Kay Cole Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Box 9, Folder 33, as well as being reprinted in *Mother Jones* and Ward Churchill's *Marxism and Native Americans* (Boston: South End Press, 1999). I have primarily used the copies found in the Kay Cole Papers, with comparisons to the printed version in *Mother Jones* in this chapter.

Leninist" ideas and convinced the "white 'left'" that they "believe[d] they share[d] our values, while rejecting the same values at every practical turn."[83]

While others around Means found themselves skeptical of Marxism as a blanket answer for indigenous issues, many non-Natives took serious issue with Means's speech.[84] As Bill Means testified, whereas many saw indigenous peoples as the first communists, after Russell's speech appeared in *Mother Jones*, Indians moved to being labelled capitalists, "so we get it from all sides."[85] *Revolutionary Worker* wrote up the speech and Means's appearance at the gathering saying the speech "disgusted literally hundreds, [and] left thousands with a sour taste in their mouths," while noting that the attendees were mostly anti-nuke activists with a small group of American Indians and some local ranchers. In a lengthy retort, the paper claimed Means was a retrograde seeking to return to more primitive times and capitulating to the status quo social order of capitalism.[86] Anthropologist and activist Steve Talbot, while not responding directly to Means, echoed much of the *Revolutionary Worker* argument in his book *The Roots of*

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[83] Copy of Means's speech to International Survival Gathering, Kay Cole Papers, Box 9, Folder 33, page 14.

[84] Ward Churchill, who worked with Means at the Denver AIM chapter wrote in "False Promises: An Indigenist Examination of Marxist Theory and Practice" that "*no* Marxist-Leninist setting have the national rights of *any* small people been respected, most especially not those of land-based, indigenous ('tribal') peoples." Furthermore, "The punch line is that Marxism as a worldview is not only diametrically opposed to that held by indigenous peoples, it also quite literally precludes their right to a continued existence as functioning socio-cultural entities" because Marx's ideal cultural model was based solely on European cultures. Ward Churchill, *Since Predator Came: Notes from the Struggle for American Indian Liberation* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 318, 324.

[85] Bill Means, Testimony, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 22, 5.

[86] "Searching for the 'Second Harvest: Russell Means' Attack on Revolutionary Marxism," *Revolutionary Worker*, August 22, 1980, Eda Gordon Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Box 1, Folder 23, 9, 14, 20-21.

Oppression: The American Indian Question. After laying out the litany of ways in which Native Americans have been exploited by the federal government over the years, Talbot concludes by arguing that indigenous peoples needed to clearly define their friends versus their enemies, otherwise there would not be an effective response to Reagan's policies of a military build-up. In Talbot's view, "the best and truest allies of Native American peoples and nationalities in the fight-back, in terms of their structural position in the U.S. political economy, will be the other oppressed minorities and the working class generally."[87]

The issue of corporation and capitalist exploitation were important to indigenous peoples across the world and would grow increasingly more pressing in the decade that followed with the rise of globalization and trade agreements that had a disproportionate affect on rural communities. But as Martin Andersen writes in *Peoples of the Earth*, "Efforts to cast native demands in the left-right dichotomy not only does a disservice to understanding the issues at hand; they frequently further marginalize those who have little voice in their own labelling." Furthermore, as activists in South America argued, the attempts to lump indigenous issues into socialist causes many times resulted in the "paternalism of traditional elites…replaced by a class-based paternalism in "subtle revolutionary-proletariat camouflage."[88] The discussions at both the tribunal and in the preceding years highlighted attempts of Native Americans to define themselves in relation to western political ideologies, yet the discussions were only a small part of

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[87] Steve Talbot, *Roots of Oppression: The American Indian Question*, 1st ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1981), 193.

[88] Martin Edwin Andersen, *Peoples of the Earth: Ethnonationalism, Democracy, and the Indigenous Challenge in 'Latin' America.* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 53, 56.

Native activism at the turn of the 1980s. Even though AIM had sought to transition away from occupations and confrontations with the government, the 1980s witnessed both the Yellow Thunder Camp in South Dakota and the Big Mountain protest on the Navajo/Hopi Reservation. Both protests attracted considerable attention in Indian Country, and both became prominent events in promoting indigenous issues in the U.S. around the world. In addition, attempts to deliver housing opportunities for the urban Indian community in Minneapolis rooted itself in rhetoric similar to that used by Yellow Thunder and Big Mountain. All three helped to build connections and translate the abstract ideas of the preceding discussions into on-the-ground activities, building on the idea that the international and local events of indigenous activism were connected.

Land and Relocations

In South Dakota Russell Means and activists organized the Yellow Thunder Camp to emphasize both the importance of the Black Hills for the Oglala Sioux as well as the significance of traditional ways. Named after Raymond Yellow Thunder, an Oglala man killed by whites in a reservation border town in the early 1970s, the camp was "the Dakota answer to Reaganomics, genocide planned by the U.S.A., colonialism, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, and violence."[89] The camp, situated on federal land, would be a back to the land movement for the Lakotas and served as a way of reasserting traditional practices. After its creation in early 1981, the camp, popular with both Lakotas and non-Natives who came from as far away as Japan and central Europe, served as a thorn in the side of the Forest Service and the federal government. However, the camp

[89] Russell Means, "DQ University Conference, April 20, 1982, 2:30PM," Kay Cole Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

also attracted people who were less concerned with the movement, but rather simply sought free shelter, food, or escaping the hassles of Rapid City. In July 1982, a few months prior to the AIIT's opening, a white resident of Rapid City died at the camp from gunshot wounds, prompting the federal government to quicken attempts to shut it down.[90] The camp would continue, but Means, originally dedicated to the movement, grew frustrated with the camp and would ultimately leave both it and the American Indian Movement in 1985, saying he was sick of "babysitting" the camp.[91] Yellow Thunder, however, provided opportunities that Wounded Knee in 1973 did not; notably, for a period it had much greater local support than Wounded Knee did and at least for a period offered chances to discuss issues affecting indigenous peoples without the sensationalism of the previous protest.

Meanwhile, the protests at Big Mountain arose from the partition of the Joint Use Area of the shared Hopi/Diné lands in northeastern Arizona. The area had a group of roughly 15,000 traditional Diné and less than a thousand Hopis who were subject to removal after Public Law 95-531 divided the area between the two tribes to settle the conflict over control. Many of the residents were older, non-English speaking members who saw little issue with the situation as it stood prior to passage of the 1977 law. In contrast, those testifying about the issue at the AIIT pointed to the mineral deposits under

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[90] *New York Times*, September 27, 1982.

[91] *News from Indian Country,* February 28, 1988.

the land, particularly coal and uranium, which could be more easily exploited by corporations in the event the land dispute was settled.[92]

While Big Mountain was one of the remotest segments of the southwest reservation, Clyde Bellecourt testified at the tribunal about the Little Earth housing development in Minneapolis, which sought to provide affordable housing for Indigenous residents. Little Earth was a 2.3-acre housing development created by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1960s. Located close to Franklin Avenue, the center of Minneapolis's indigenous community, a majority of the development's occupants were Native Americans. By the mid-1970s, the development had fallen into disrepair with many of the units uninhabitable. The American Indian Movement pushed to take over management of the development, and after a community vote the organization, with Clyde Bellecourt as the official head, was selected to manage the property. According to AIM and Bellecourt, in subsequent years the community was drastically transformed; yet, HUD continued to present additional obstacles for its development. Rent increases were regularly withheld by the government, and the tribunal report documented instances of HUD demanding millions of dollars in repairs that could not be paid for without the increased rent payments it was withholding.[93] Nevertheless, the project continued, and in his testimony at the tribunal, Bellecourt summed up the importance of the project and aligned it with the rural protests by saying, "Relocation is

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[92] Testimonies by Laura Kadenehe and Eugene Hasgood, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 16.

[93] See "Summary Report of the Tribunal Task Force," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, 7-11; Clyde Bellecourt testimony, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 19; Clyde H. Bellecourt and Jon Lurie, *The Thunder Before the Storm: The Autobiography of Clyde Bellecourt* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016).

stopping right here, at Little Earth. It's stopping at D.Q. University…at Yellow Thunder, it's stopping wherever our people are."[94]

Conclusion

The American Indian International Tribunal was an attempt to build on the successes of the 1970s and further expand indigenous connections to events outside the United States while at the same time creating indigenous ideas about how to approach the international world. While the IITC, AIM, and other activist organizations had expanded internationally, visiting countries and building alliances with various political and governmental entities, the venture was at many times a lonely affair. Bill Means noted in testimony that in his years working with both AIM and the IITC, "we heard a lot of support, we heard a lot of rhetoric," but many of those statements did not translate into full support of the movement. But at the same time the experiences of the previous decade had awaken him to the potential victories that could be had on the international level. Not only was it natural, given that Indian nations signed treaties with the U.S. and were supposed to be operating as government-to-government entities, but indigenous peoples around the world provided alliances and support that was not possible from the various non-native groups that had come to support AIM and the IITC. While reservations had their issues, the best thing Native Americans could do in the 1980s was to "internationalize our people on the local level," essentially going around the U.S. to secure funding for those issues at home.[95] For Means and other activists at the American

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[94] Quoted in "Summary Report of the Tribunal Task Force," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, 9.

[95] Bill Means testimony, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 22, 6.

Indian International Tribunal, the international stage was not only a national place for indigenous issues, but the most powerful.

Yet, when the American Indian International Tribunal concluded in September 1982, ruling that "native peoples of the third world…are being subjected to slavery by the policy of the United States in supporting the international monetary system and the multinational corporations that roam freely around the world sucking up the world's natural resources for their own profit," there seemed to be little consensus on how to actually progress.[96] Reagan was obviously not impeached by the movement, and divisions were beginning to open among those in attendance. Nevertheless, Dennis Banks concluded the tribunal proceedings, noting that it would be headed to the Yellow Thunder Camp to take testimonies and document the issues in South Dakota (without Banks, who was still under indictment in the state for issues related to the occupation of Wounded Knee), but he hoped that the tribunal could remain active into the future. Speaking on where the movement could go in the coming years, Banks said, "We may keep this tribunal in session, going from place to place. Even if we have to years from now call a tribunal in South Africa, or the Philippines or Nicaragua or wherever."[97] The AIIT would move to the Yellow Thunder Camp and then onto Minneapolis to visit the Little Earth housing development, but it did not reconvene in the manner Banks laid out. While originally meant as a one-time event, the tribunal ruled that it needed to stay in session in order to protect indigenous peoples from governments, both large and small.

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[96] American Indian International Tribunal, "Preliminary Judgment," Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 29, 4.

[97] Dennis Banks Statement, September 22, 1982, Kay Cole Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

The tribunal's order reaffirmed indigenous sovereignty from both the United States and international structures as a whole. While the tribunal sought to create a separate space for Indigenous issues at the start of the 1980s, the growing Nicaraguan controversy of the decade showed that separating those issues was much harder in practice.[98] After 1982 the tribunal largely faded from view, one of the many pieces of Native activism overlooked during the period. But Banks' mention of Nicaragua was significant because even in 1982, the Central America country was already beginning to divide indigenous activists over Sandinista conduct towards the Miskitu Indians of the eastern coast. While the tribunal did not move to Nicaragua, numerous U.S. activists did and their experiences and opinions on the matter, provide an important way of seeing how the ideas discussed at the AIIT translated towards reality.

[98] American Indian International Tribunal, "Order," Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

"[DIS]-UNITING THE RED PEOPLE OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE: INDIGENOUS ACTIVISTS IN NICARAGUA

In November of 1985 Russell Means held a press conference in San José, Costa Rica and proclaimed his desire to recruit roughly 100 "warriors from North America" to take part in supporting Nicaragua's Miskitu Indians, who were fighting for increased sovereignty from the country's ruling Sandinista government.[1] Means, who had recently "resigned" from the American Indian Movement but remained one of the most prominent American Indian activists, argued the call for support would begin the process of "uniting the red people of the Western Hemisphere" to back indigenous rights regardless of national borders.[2] Means' larger than life personality ensured his call for recruits gained media attention across the United States, but his participation in Nicaragua was only a small, uncoordinated part of a much larger engagement in the country by U.S.-based Indian activists who sought to foster indigenous rights throughout the hemisphere rather than solely in the United States. While the movement across international boundaries

[1] There are various spellings for the Miskitu tribe in Nicaragua. Miskitu is the native language term for the tribe while Miskito is the Spanish version derived from the indigenous language. Outside of quoted sources I follow the general trend in indigenous studies to utilize the indigenous term for the tribe.

[2] "U.S. Indians Enlist in the Miskito Cause," *New York Times*, November 11, 1985.

began following Wounded Knee, the events in Nicaragua grew out of the discussions at the United Nations in the late 1970s and the attempts to define an Indigenous political identity in the early 1980s. Nicaragua, then, was a real-world attempt to move beyond discussions and support on-the-ground change for Indigenous groups. Nicaragua, however, was also a central pillar of Ronald Reagan's aggressive Cold War policy and the civil war in the country between the ruling Sandinista government and the U.S.-backed Contras meant observers in the United States equated criticism of the Sandinistas' Indigenous policies with support for Reagan's political ideology and goals. As a result, Nicaragua fostered a serious schism within Native activism in the United States, a divide that highlighted the limitations of Native protest during the Cold War, fundamentally altered the landscape of Indigenous activism and broke up the collations between white liberals and Native Americans that came to the forefront during the Red Power era of the early 1970s.

Events in Nicaragua during the 1980s have been the subject of extensive historical research from both Latin American historians and U.S. foreign policy historians.[1] Yet the relationship between indigenous peoples of the east coast and the largely Hispanic Pacific coast during the 1980s has been given little more than cursory notes within much of the historiography. Many of the materials on the subject situate the Miskitu protests within the Contra backlash to the rebellion or place the indigenous groups alongside the

[1] Much of the background material on US policies in Latin America during the Cold War was pulled from Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

campesino (peasant) protests against the Sandinista government (FSLN). Hal Brands in *Latin America's Cold War*-one of the more comprehensive works on Latin America and the Cold War-devotes part of a paragraph to the Miskitu movement, combining them with groups like the Anti-Sandinista Popular Militias (MILPAS) that controlled much of the opposition in the mountainous interior of the country and opposed Sandinista policies of forced collective farming.[2]

Most accounts that provide major emphasis on the Miskitu situation take opposing sides, arguing the conflict arose from either failed Sandinista policies or the covert operations of Reagan's CIA. Philippe Bourgois, writing contemporaneously in 1985, argued that while the Miskitus and other eastern coast indigenous peoples had historic tensions with the Pacific coast, the underlying issue of the violence was United States support for counter-revolutionary forces. According to Bourgois, "the responsibility for the conversion of these historic tensions into a fratricidal war lies with the United States, which armed, trained, and provided international legitimation for the counterrevolutionary…forces, thereby preventing a peaceful solution based on dialogue and compromise from emerging."[3] Furthermore, he argued that the Miskitus did not constitute a "sovereign nation-state" but were instead a "mystified" group that grew out of historical exploitation by the British to undermine Spanish colonization.[4] In contrast,

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[2] Brands, 201-202.

[3] Philippe Bourgois, in *Nicaragua: The First Five Years*, ed. Thomas W. Walker (New York: Praeger, 1985), 201–16, 201.

[4] Ibid., 207.

Bourgois takes a complimentary view of the Sandinistas, noting that the revolutionary government had taken a number of steps to correct relations with the indigenous peoples.

In comparison to Bourgois's account. which cites external factors as the cause for most of the conflict on the eastern coast, anthropologist Charles Hale argues in *Resistance and Contradiction* that the conflict arose as much from contradictions within the revolution as it did from outside forces. Hale's account, which remains the most comprehensive account of Miskitu interactions with the Nicaraguan state, centers on the divide between the Sandinistas' "passionate defiance of U.S. imperialism" and Miskitu acceptance of "Anglo-American neocolonialism," which made them ambivalent towards Sandinista encroachment.[5] Hale's work is important not only because of its comprehensiveness, but also because Hale travelled within both the Sandinista and Miskitu spheres without much resistance. As a result of his work with the Center for Research and Documentation on the Atlantic Coast (CIDCA) and his anthropological fieldwork in Sandy Cay, Nicaragua, Hale's book provides an examination of the conflict from the perspective of someone sympathetic to the revolutionary aims but ambivalent about the execution of the goals on the eastern coast.

In contrast to the accounts that detail events in Nicaragua, far fewer works have explored the connections between Miskitus and international indigenous organizations. György Ferenc Tóth provides a cursory overview of the events rooted in the competing autobiographies of Russell Means and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and noted that the conflict was a real world example of American Indian activists being fractured over the debate on

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[5] Charles R. Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 15, 27.

Marxism.[6] More comprehensively, James Jenkins's chapter, "The Indian Wing: Nicaragua Indians, Native American Activists, and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1979-1990," correctly highlights the indigenous issues at stake in the country and chronicles the issues U.S. activists faced when they became involved. Jenkins, however, argues the U.S.-based activists ultimately weakened the position of the Miskitus by ignoring historic claims to a Miskitu Kingdom founded in the nineteenth century and instead moved towards "militant pan-Indianism that resembled the Red Power era of the United States."[7] Jenkins's account, while moving along many of the same avenues as this one, provides a relatively limited assessment of the conflict. The Miskitu activism in Nicaragua in the 1980s was not a new event and reflected long-term goals of Indigenous activists in the region. Furthermore, while it is correct that Russell Means at least rhetorically embraced direct action akin to Wounded Knee, the majority of U.S. activists attempted to utilize strategies similar to the pre-Red Power era of the 1960s chronicled by Daniel Cobb in *Native Activism in Cold War America* that focused not on militant action, but diplomacy and working through established channels.

This system-based activism happened in large part because most U.S. activists were sympathetic to the Nicaraguan revolution and saw the clear benefits to a Sandinista government. Nicaragua marked a pivotal movement for these activists; it was an attempt

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[6] György Ference Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty Between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 196-201.

[7] James Jenkins, "The Indian Wing: Nicaraguan Indians, Native American Activists, and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1979-1990," in *Beyond the Eagle's Shadow: New Histories of Latin America's Cold War," Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Mark Atwood Lawrence, and Julio E. Moreno, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 194.

to have a leftist revolution that embraced indigenous issues, and this fact is what makes the conflict over Nicaragua such a confusing and difficult topic to address. In many respects the debate was less about Nicaragua than personalities in the United States. Overwhelmingly activists agreed on the basic principles that the Sandinistas were the better of the two sides, and Indigenous rights needed to be upheld. Yet, for much of the 1980s, members of the American Indian Movement, the International Indian Treaty Council, and others across the activist landscape fought about Nicaragua and lobbed accusations with ferocity that overshadowed the substance of the debate. As a result, Nicaragua was a mess of revolutionary contradictions that left many alleged supporters of indigenous rights in no better standing than the Reagan administration, which superficially embraced Miskitu rights to undermine the Sandinista Revolution.

Roots of Rebellion: Miskitus and the Nicaraguan State

Even in the 1980s the eastern coast of Nicaragua was a remote, inhospitable area that remained largely a mystery to Nicaraguans living on the Pacific coast. While the Pacific regions had extensive development, the eastern half of Nicaragua was mostly undeveloped and required the use of boats to reach many remote villages. The region had a population of "Spaniards," Nicaraguans of Spanish heritage, but it was primarily dominated by the Indigenous Miskitu with smaller tribes including the Sumu and Rama that remains true today. Furthermore, the area had a large population of *creoles*, mixed-race Nicaraguan that trace their heritage back to African slaves brought to the region by the British. The two main centers of population in the region are Bluefields in the south, which serves as the center for the region's *creole* population, and Puerto Cabeza in the north, which is the center of the Miskitu population. As a result, many of the events in

this chapter occur in the northeast corner of Nicaragua and along the Rio Coco, which makes up the northern border with Honduras.

In many respects Nicaragua has long been composed of two separate entities, both only vaguely connected by national boundaries and central control. While the Spanish colonized the western half of the country throughout the colonial period, the territory claimed by the Miskitus was largely left untouched by Spanish entities. The region, however, fell under the influence of the British empire which sought to utilize the area to check the Spaniards on the other side of the mountain ranges that essentially divide the country in half. Instead of establishing major settlements, the British supported the creation of what became the Mosquito Kingdom or Mosquitia, and the creation of a Miskitu king. In the place of an imperial British presence, the region drew influence from Moravian missionaries who made deep in-roads into Miskitu communities and made the Moravian Church the major religious institution in the region. The end result was both Miskitu affinity for the British over the Spanish and the development of layers of colonialism as the Miskitus exploited the British backing to subjugate other Indian tribes such as the Sumu. When the British pulled out of the isthmus in the latter part of the 1700s, the Miskitus successfully managed to curtail Spanish attempts to incorporate the region for much of the next half century and "exercised unprecedented political autonomy."[8] By the end of the 1800s the region witnessed a rapid period of economic colonization at the hands of American enterprises and politicians seeking to exploit the region's vast natural resources, including the construction of a trans-isthmian canal.

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[8] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 39.

Figure 2: Map of the Zelaya Department, which comprised Mosquitia (Wikimedia Commons)[9]

While Great Britain's involvement on the east coast declined in the latter part of the 1700s, its formal claim to Mosquitia as a protectorate did not end until 1860, when the British ceded the territory to the independent Nicaraguan state. The region, however, was largely ignored by the Nicaraguan government until 1894, when troops occupied Bluefields and attempted to exert formal control of the territory. Carried out by President José Santos Zelaya, the orders were based on the idea that the 1860 treaty between the British and Nicaraguans was invalid because the Miskitus it sought to protect had "withdrawn deep into the jungle…while the Reserve Government has become a contemptible fiction under the control of black usurpers [*negros usurpadores*]."[10] The British sent some troops to the region for police protection of British interests but refused to officially get involved on the side of the Miskitus. While Nicaragua now claimed control over the eastern half of the country, the region retained a strong Anglo affinity,

[9] "Zelaya in Nicaragua," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zelaya_in_Nicaragua.svg [Accessed April 9, 2018]

[10] Ibid., 41.

and most indigenous peoples remained ambivalent at the very least when it came to control from Managua.

Following reincorporation into the Nicaraguan state, Mosquitia continued to experience development by North American interests but now had to confront issues of land titles, taxes, and migration of mestizos from the Pacific Coast.[11] Miskitu leaders first attempted to seek support from the British government, which they still held in high regard. When diplomacy and international appeals failed to secure a return to Miskitu control, individuals began to utilize more militant actions. In 1906 Miskitu leaders sent Sam Pitts, a tribal member from the northern region, to Jamaica in the hopes of negotiating a deal with the British. When Pitts failed, he returned and began a militant campaign to overthrow Nicaraguan rule. While Pitts was executed within a year, and the movement failed to secure support outside of the Miskitu community, both the diplomatic program and Pitts's militant response are significant. Writing in *Nicaraguan Perspectives*, activist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz argues the kingdom was little more than a paper fiction in the British government's "self-serving struggle" against the Spanish, and the "king" (Dunbar-Ortiz utilizes the quotes) was "chosen and installed by the British for two centuries."[12] While Dunbar-Ortiz is correct in noting that the arrival of the British had a negative effect on indigenous peoples who found themselves subjugated by

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[11] Generally, this chapter uses the term *Spaniard* which notes a person has both indigenous and Hispanic heritage in line with its use for much of the period covered to signify individuals from the Hispanic Pacific Coast.

[12] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "The Indigenous Question and the Miskito People in Nicaragua," draft of article published in *Nicaraguan Perspectives*. Tonantzin Land Institute Records, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico Special Collections, Albuquerque, Box 21, Folder 2.

Miskitus, she downplays the agency of Miskitus in the region.[13] As Charles Hale argues, the basic contradiction of the Miskitu mobilization in the early 1900s was both a firm rejection of the Nicaraguan government and an affinity for British colonialism that advanced their cause "at the cost of a reinforced sense of dependence on a powerful external actor."[14]

Nicaraguan politics for almost half of the twentieth century were dominated by the Somoza family which included Anatasio Somoza ("Tacho") who took power in 1937 and centralized the government to increase both his power and wealth. During his nearly forty-four-year authoritarian rule known as *somocismo*, Tacho exploited populist rhetoric to build alliances with the country's labor unions as a counter-weight to conservative opposition to his tenure in office. Utilizing both the savvy alliances and rampant corruption, Tacho removed essentially all serious opposition to his tenure. Following his assassination in 1956, control of the government essentially fell to his two sons Luis and then Anastasio ("Tachito"). Rising anti-communist sentiments led Luis to crack down on labor unions in the country ending the populist alliance with unions. Both brothers were less skilled at managing the legacies of *somocismo*, and the 1970s witnessed a further weakening of the regime as opposition increasingly arose to Tachito's growing dictatorial

[13] In many respects the region parallels the development of the American Southwest and the after affects of Spanish colonialism that were documented by Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2008).

[14] Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction*, 51.

powers and the spread of economic issues that inflated prices and cut supplies throughout the country.[15]

The weakening of *somocismo* in the second half of the 1970s provided an opening for the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to make a remarkable come-back. During the 1960s the small group had been roundly marginalized by the National Guard, and most who remained saw themselves as nothing more than a small "group of conspirators" rather than a legitimate revolutionary movement.[16] The group ultimately split during the decade into three wings: the Prolonged Popular War, which drew influence from the guerrilla campaigns in Vietnam and based itself in the mountain peasant communities; the proletarian wing, which sought to mobilize urban union members and workers into a revolutionary movement; and the *tercerista* (Third Way), which aligned itself with more conservative elements and ultimately became the biggest segment of the FSLN. Given how contradictory the Third Way was to the other two factions, leader Daniel Ortega had to regularly deny that he sought to create a movement that amounted to "Somozism without Somoza."[17]

The conflict between the Sandinistas and Tachito's government largely took place on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua and away from Misquitia. Nevertheless, the events would deeply influence the region and lead to a resurgence of Miskitu activism. As Charles Hale argues, the rise of Miskitu activism in the 1970s and 1980s was not new, rather it was a reversion to previous history that witnessed a Miskitu territory that

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[15] Brands, 167-168.

[16] Ibid., 169.

[17] Ibid., 173.

retained power to roughly the same degree as the Nicaraguan state. As with other rights movements, the formation of the first modern Miskitu rights group, ALLPROMISU (Alliance for Progress of Miskitu and Sumu), came about from class conflicts between the indigenous peoples and the wealthier Spaniards who had taken up residence in the region.[18] In one example Hale documented from oral interviews, the impetus for the movement came from a pregnant Miskitu woman who was told to "Go and have [her] baby out on the street." Opposition also arose to secure land rights from the Somoza government and in response to economic exploitation by American capitalists, which Miskitus generally argued was another way Somoza and the Spaniards were exploiting the country's indigenous peoples.[19] Armstrong Wiggins, a Miskitu representative who joined the Indian Law Resource Center, stated in 1981 that the movement arose as much from political issues with the Somoza government as from a desire to restore cultural identity. According to Wiggins, "Our culture must survive, so we can continue to exist. The contemporary organizing sought to revitalize our religion, our culture, the way of our grandparents…."[20]

After its founding in 1974, ALLPROMISU worked within the Somoza government to promote both indigenous political autonomy and cultural revival throughout the Misquitia and continued after the Sandinista uprising in 1979. The

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[18] Many of the indigenous organizations appear in various publications under multiple spellings or acronyms—for instance ALLPROMISU appears at times as ALLPROMISO. I have attempted to use the most common version except when quoting a source.

[19] Ibid., 73-75.

[20] "Colonialism and Revolution: Nicaraguan Sandinism and the Liberation of the Miskito, Sumu, and Rama Peoples — An Interview with Armstrong Wiggins," *Akwesasne Notes*, Autumn 1981, 7.

Sandinistas, and leader Daniel Ortega in particular, were not entirely supportive of the idea of an ethnic-based group and proposed ALLPROMISU and indigenous peoples utilize the Association of Rural Workers arguing that everyone in the movement was part of a collective whole. When ALLPROMISU leaders Steadman Fagoth, Brooklyn Rivera, and Hazel Lou, along with the four-hundred and fifty delegates to the 1979 ALLPROMISU conference, rejected the idea, Ortega and the Sandinistas agreed to the formation of MISURASATA (Miskitos, Suma, Rama, and Sandinistas All Together) to be the representative for indigenous issues.[21] Originally founded simply as MISURA, the addition of Sandinistas to the name was a critical requirement for the revolutionary government to signal that the indigenous issues were part of the revolution and supportive of the government. Miskitu Indians later told an NIYC representative that, "We looked to the triumph of the Revolution, with its basis in a philosophy of liberation from oppression, as a vehicle by which we could regain our self determination."[22] The early co-operation between the Sandinistas and indigenous leaders would fray over the next fourteen months as Sandinista policies began to marginalize the popular representatives' position in the government, and many Miskitos began to move towards militant actions.

Following its creation, MISURASATA quickly became the leading political entity across the Misquitia and began to challenge the Sandinistas for control of governmental operations across the region. Not only were Miskitus vying with the

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[21] Ibid., 133.

[22] Jim Anaya, "A Miskito Memoir," in *Impact* (Albuquerque Journal Magazine), September 11, 1984, 3. NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 1.

revolution for control, but the legacies of ALLPROMISU's work within the Somoza government over the course of the 1970s caused fear that the organization still had sympathies for the old dictator and was not so quietly working to undermine the revolution under the guise of ethnic revival. While the organization had a formal seat at the Council of State in Managua, the Sandinista leadership formed the Nicaraguan Institute of the Atlantic Coast (INNICA) and channeled much of their work in the region through the organization that was headed by a Pacific Coast resident who was "unfamiliar with [the] Indian reality."[23] While marginalized in their view, in 1980 MISURASATA secured a major victory when it compelled the Sandinista government to offer a proposed literacy campaign in native languages rather than solely in Spanish. Following the victory, MISURASATA organized youth groups comprised of high school and university students to work in the program and promote indigenous languages. These "brigadistas" travelled around the remote eastern coast not only bringing the literacy campaign to small villages but highlighting issues of Miskitu rights. As a result, the villages were not only integrated into the Miskitu struggle but the youth leaders also "gained an emotionally charged sense of identity and solidarity with their people."[24]

At the same time, MISURASATA began to organize a campaign for increased land rights for Indigenous peoples, a move that quickly resulted in a complete break with the Sandinista leadership. In February 1981, the FSLN ordered the arrest of fifty MISURASATA leaders and held major figures such as Steadman Fagoth for "separatist"

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[23] "Colonialism and Revolution," 11.

[24] Ibid., 134.

views and alleged covert actions on behalf of the old Somoza government. Most of those rounded up in the first half of 1981 were released shortly after being taken into custody, the lone exception being Fagoth who was held until May and subsequently fled to Honduras upon his release.[25] While originally sympathetic towards the Sandinistas, Fagoth would ultimately lead offshoots of MISURASATA in Honduras and align himself with CIA-backed Contra movements originating in the country.

Issues and claims of Miskitu connections to the Contras increased in December of 1981 when Sandinista forces attempted to move 8,500 tribal members from their traditional homelands along the Río Coco River on the border with Honduras, arguing the area was unsafe due to Contra activity. The operation, called Red Christmas, resulted in the death of dozens of Miskitu Indians, the displacement of thousands more, and served as one of the major issues U.S.-based activist organizations would seek to address upon becoming involved in the issue. Inversely, the term Red Christmas has come to signify a CIA-backed Contra operation that required the relocation of Miskitus for their own personal safety.[26] It is in this environment that U.S. activists began to work and the contradictory definitions of Red Christmas provide some understanding of how divided and difficult it was for activists to position Indigenous issues within the Nicaraguan Civil War.

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[25] Ibid., 135.

[26] Mateo Cayetano Jarquín, "Red Christmases: The Sandinistas, Indigenous Rebellion, and the Origins of the Nicaraguan Civil War, 1981-82," *Cold War History* 18, no. 1 (January 2018):, 97.

Early Indigenous Support for the Sandinistas

Because of their prominence on the international stage and the Sandinista endorsement of the occupation of Wounded Knee, the International Indian Treaty Council and members of the American Indian Movement were invited to Nicaragua to observe issues related to the Sandinista/Miskitu conflict and provide advice to the government. Between 1981 and 1983, the IITC/AIM made a handful of visits to Nicaragua to document the events on the eastern coast of the country. During visits the group claimed to interview over 2,000 Miskitu Indians, leading the group to conclude that not only were events in the region the result of U.S. involvement but, also that "The liberation of the natural world is in the balance."[27]

While leaders such as Clyde Bellecourt toured Nicaragua and endorsed the revolutionary goals, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz was one of the most vocal supporters and made numerous trips to the country to work with the Sandinista government. While a trained academic, Dunbar-Ortiz spent much of her time prior to the 1980s working with various activist causes, including the IITC and AIM. Writing in *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War*, the third in her multi-part historical memoir series, Dunbar-Ortiz writes that her goal was "to rally support for the Miskitus within the revolutionary process, and to try to help the Sandinista leadership understand Indigenous aspirations."[28] Furthermore, she felt that the Sandinista government had a real opportunity to "become a model for Indigenous self-determination amid a world of negative examples" through the

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[27] "I.I.T.C. Nicaragua Report" in untitled material, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 10.

[28] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War*, Oklahoma paperback edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 81.

promotion of U.N. human rights forums and the inclusion of Indigenous Atlantic Coast peoples in the delegations.[29] The biggest problem facing the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua according to Dunbar-Ortiz, was not the government in Managua but rather the threat of US imperialism that would seek to divide the Indigenous peoples against one another in the same manner U.S. forces had exploited divisions during the Indian wars of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, she argued, while the Indigenous policies of the early 1980s were plagued with mistakes, the threat of the Contras and U.S. support for rebellious groups in Nicaragua contributed to the Sandinistas hesitantly to work with Miskitus and other groups.[30]

While Dunbar-Ortiz talked about supporting the Miskitus within the revolution, she was ambivalent towards many of the leaders. The activities of Steadman Fagoth, as well as MISURASATA leader Brooklyn Rivera, who distanced himself from Fagoth's Contra-aligned group in Honduras, were the culmination of interventionist policies that sought to exploit the "just ethnic demands of the people" to at the very least disrupt the revolution but could also have culminated in the eastern third of the Nicaraguan territory being declared independent, which would ultimately lead to "debilitating and isolating

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[29] Ibid., 87. In *Indians of the Americas: Human Rights and Self-Determination* (London: Zed Books, 1984), she writes that, "The aspirations of the indigenous population of America, traditionally exploited, oppressed and subjected to the rigours of a brutal internal colonialist system, are now aspirations contained within the Sandinista Revolutions; aspirations which must not be betrayed." Excerpted in IITC Report on the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, First Session, August 9-13, 1982. Raul Salinas Papers, M0774, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA, Box 23, Folder 5.

[30] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "The Indigenous Question and the Miskito People in Nicaragua," Paper written for inclusion in *Nicaraguan Perspectives*, Tonantzin Land Institute Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Box 21, Folder 2, 2.

Nicaragua from the Atlantic and the Caribbean."[31] While other historians, including Jenkins, embrace the legitimacy of the historical treaties that governed the Miskitu and British relations and argue they were a more legitimate avenue to achieve Indigenous rights in Nicaragua during the 1980s, Dunbar-Ortiz dismissed the treaties as historical incidents of "imperialism" and contended that the whole argument was "artificial and false." According to this narrative, "In none of this did the Miskito people, or even the 'king' nor the Nicaraguan people play a role, or carry on a struggle for real self-determination."[32]

Dunbar-Ortiz's public appearances and vocal endorsement of the Sandinista government made her the main point of criticism for groups aligned with MISURASATA. Bernard Nietschmann, a Berkeley geography professor who provided reports for the Miskitus, responded to Dunbar-Ortiz's criticism that he utilized a "romantic, indígenista view which could later be easily manipulated by the CIA" by saying he had a file entitled "Roxanne, Don't Turn On the Red Light" that included quotes from "Chairwoman Rox(-anne Dunbar-Ortiz)" and "Managua Rose."[33] Hank Adams circulated a "dossier" of documents that criticized a number of pro-Sandinista indigenous activists and explicitly claimed Dunbar-Ortiz should be investigated for

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[31] Ibid., 5.

[32] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "Notes on the clarification of the issue of treaties as a basis for Indian land and other rights…," Ibid., 3.

[33] Ibid., 198. The file is a clear reference to "Roxanne," a single by The Police from 1978 that centered on a prostitute.

fraudulently claiming to be Indian as well as "for treason for giving aid and comfort to the enemy–the enemy being Nicaragua, but also Cuba."[34]

The criticisms continued, but Dunbar-Ortiz claimed the cruelest response to her positions came from National Indian Youth Council Chairman Gerald Wilkinson, who rather than publicly attacking her in the press, simply stopped talking to her.[35] In communications to supporters, however, Wilkinson expressed frustration with Dunbar-Ortiz's positions. When the Youth Council received letters imploring it to consider consulting Dunbar-Ortiz, Wilkinson pointed to what he saw as a contradictory statement in which she compared Miskitu fighters to "Indian Brothers who looked like they had just come down from Yellow Thunder camp…or Big Mountain…talking about the hemispheric struggle for self-determination."[36] NIYC staff attorney James Anaya also had communications with Dunbar-Ortiz in late 1985 when she criticized him for refusing to stand on the same stage as her during an appearance in Albuquerque. Anaya claimed her positions supporting the Sandinistas were out of line with the NIYC's position endorsing Miskitu sovereignty, but welcomed further discussions. In subsequent letters the two sparred over whose position on the subject had changed over time. According to Dunbar-Ortiz, her opinions on the subject had remained consistent; instead, the NIYC and other pro-Miskitu organizations had "opportunistically exploited this issue for your

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[34] ibid., 240. Dunbar-Ortiz has long maintained her mother was "part-Indian" but has never claimed enrollment in any federally recognized Indian tribe in the United States. Additional information can be found in Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Red Dirt: Growing up Okie* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), her memoir of her childhood through 1960.

[35] Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 240.

[36] Gerald Wilkinson letter to E. Perry Winston, February 10, 1986, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 1, 10.

own motives," and they "contributed to the continuation of the conflict and the misinformation initiated by the Reagan administration, rather than working to resolve the authentic issues involved."[37]

While Dunbar-Ortiz took the brunt of the criticism from the NIYC and its allies, her position fit within the position of the International Indian Treaty Council, which had remained consistent since the start of the revolution. The official IITC position on the situation in Nicaragua was complimentary to the Sandinistas and stated that while there were legitimate concerns about the relations between the Miskitus and the Sandinista government—notably in relation to state of emergency laws which limited due process and effective administration of governmental programs—the link between the two had "many positive aspects" and that the "government of Nicaragua is becoming more and more sensitive to the unique needs of the Indian populations and is attempting to make serious gains in the improvement of the quality of life for them."[38] Even though the revolution had many positives for leftists, Clyde Bellecourt acknowledged in his autobiography that the early support the Sandinistas provided to the occupation of Wounded Knee and the fact that both were fighting against "covert operations" by the U.S. government played a role in AIM/IITC's solid endorsement of the Revolution.[39]

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[37] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz letter to James Anaya, November 27, 1985, NIYC Paper, Box 22, Folder 5. Additional letters between the two are also available.

[38] IITC Statement on Nicaragua, submitted to to UN Commission on Human Rights, February 4, 1983. Raul Salinas Papers, M0774, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA, Box 32, Folder 5.

[39] Clyde H. Bellecourt and Jon Lurie, *The Thunder Before the Storm: The Autobiography of Clyde Bellecourt* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016), 271, 277.

Russell Means and the Divide Within AIM

Even though AIM and the IITC had come out firmly in support of the Sandinista Revolution and Russell Means had a weak relationship with the organization in the mid-1980s, his history with the group continued to make him its most well-known member ,regardless of what he or others perceived his role to be. After Means made his trip to Nicaragua in late 1985, he returned to the United States and stated he was ready to assist the Miskitus in any capacity they needed, saying "With a shovel in one hand, a rifle in my other hand, and peace in my heart, I stand with the Miskito Indians against all foreign invaders."[40] Means was initially ambivalent about the trip but came around to the idea because "When one Indian anywhere in the world is treated with racial hatred, all Indians are victims."[41] While Means' position within AIM is always debatable, the leadership situation within the organization was even cloudier when it came to Nicaragua. Even though Means argued that AIM was de-centralized and had no official national leadership since Wounded Knee, he first sought approval to go to Nicaragua from his brother and Clyde Bellecourt, both of whom opposed the plan. According to Means, the unwillingness of the Bellecourts and his brother to support the Miskitus centered on the idea that "…AIM was always supposed to be on the far left of whatever white man's movement was most popular. Supporting Brooklyn Rivera and Indians who were fighting

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[40] "Media Distortion of American Indian Movement View of Nicaraguan Negotiations among the Sandinista and Miskito, Sumu, and Rama Indians," in untitled material, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 10. In a *Camp Crier* interview in April 1985, Means claimed the warriors he sought to recruit would "arrive on Miskito, Sumo, and Rama land with a weapon in one hand, a shovel in the other, and the pipe of peace and solidarity in our hearts." *Camp Crier*, April 1985, 7. NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 13.

[41] Russell Means and Marvin J Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 461.

for their lives, their people, and their culture against the 'darlings' of the Left—the Sandinistas—wasn't part of that plan."[42]

Means' position, while dismissed by other AIM activists, found support from Denver's AIM chapter that was headed by Glenn Morris and Ward Churchill along with Means. While the Denver branch of AIM took a more negative view of the Sandinistas, they did at times take a more lenient line towards the ruling government than many of Means' public statements. In one official declaration on the matter, the chapter said it acknowledged the government of Nicaragua as "the legitimate representative of the non-indigenous peoples of Nicaragua," and it opposed attempts to remove the Sandinistas from power by the United States or any other counter-revolutionary groups outside of the country. Additionally, AIM-Colorado encouraged MISURASATA to remain non-violent in its protests against the Nicaraguan government; if the organization did not feel it possible, "[AIM-Colorado] respect their right to request assistance from other indigenous peoples in the form of spiritual, material, physical, financial, or political support."[43]

Even though Means' closest allies within AIM nominally supported the Sandinistas, Means sought to promote his interpretation of the situation by touring the country with the backing of the Unification Church, a right-wing religious organization. Outside of supportive audiences in Denver, along with Seattle and Los Angeles, most of

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[42] Ibid., 463. The nature of AIM leadership structure was seemingly uncertain even to Means. He notes that all of the chapters were autonomous and he belonged to the Denver chapter along with Glenn Morris and Ward Churchill and never belonged to the Minneapolis chapter headed by the Bellecourts. Yet Means notes just a half paragraph later that had he still been directly involved with the organization he would have had to give up his ties to the Miskitus.

[43] Colorado AIM, "Position Statement of the American Indian Movement of Colorado Regarding the Indian Resistance in the Atlantic Coast Region of Nicaragua," November 14, 1985, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 10, 2.

Means' talks were met with a healthy dose of opposition. In one instance at the University of Vermont, Means went so far as to punch a protestor who yelled that the film being screened was just CIA lies.[44] Means's affiliation with the Unification Church appears to have been little more than an alliance of convenience in which Means, shunned by leftists, got paid speaking engagements and the Church got to distribute literature at events. In fact, as late as November 1985, the *Washington Times*, which was founded by Sun Myung Moon, was labelling AIM as a "militant, anti-white organization" that had members trained in "PLO terrorist camps in Libya and Lebanon." To highlight the anti-white sentiment of the organization, the *Times* included Russell Means' presence at a Nation of Islam rally at Madison Square Garden, where Means pushed for black/Indian solidarity to take back lands and said Indians "ain't nobody's Tonto" anymore.[45] Means, however, did express frustration with liberals in the United States, even telling the *Cherokee One-Feather* in 1986 that "the first time I was treated as an equal partner and appreciated for my Indianness was just a year ago" when he began to interact with libertarians and conservatives. Means distinguished his relationship with the two parties by saying liberals only asked "What can we do for you?" while conservatives asked "What can we do, together?"[46]

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[44] Ibid., 479.

[45] *Washington Times*, November 6, 1985, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 6. The paper produced another article the day prior discussing how the Nation of Islam was aligning with "radicals" and "gangs."

[46] *The Cherokee One-Feather*, December 17, 1986. NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 14. Means would go on to run for the libertarian nomination for president in 1988 losing to Texan congressman Ron Paul.

In response to Means's and Colorado-AIM's actions on Nicaragua, Clyde Bellecourt and members in Minneapolis, who claimed to be the official leaders of AIM as a whole organization, labelled the Denver chapter as "defecting" from the movement. Beginning in April of 1985, Bellecourt stated Means was only speaking for himself and no one with him had the authority to speak for AIM or the IITC in any capacity.[47] AIM supported the peace processes in Nicaragua and Means's statements against the Sandinistas arose from "his views about the white Left in this country. I think it goes back to his very early contact with some of the Sandinista leadership—personality conflicts."[48]

Ward Churchill and Glenn Morris responded to the dismissal of Colorado-AIM in the *Colorado Daily* that the Denver chapter was the "New AIM" and was being purged by the "Stalinist left" within (old) AIM for "ideological differences related to someone else's revolution." In contrast to the Minneapolis chapter, Morris and Churchill argued that Colorado-AIM stood for insuring indigenous rights rather than supporting an autonomy program in Nicaragua "that reads like a rehash of the…Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, all dressed up in Marxist language."[49] Regardless, the position of Bellecourt's AIM on Nicaragua was very different from what it articulated following Wounded Knee as it expanded internationally. In a November 1985 press release,

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[47] AIM Press Release, November 13, 1985, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 5.

[48] "Black-Led New Alliance Party Stands…In Solidarity with the American Indian Movement," NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 13. The material is undated but comes from an interview Bellecourt did following a February 26, 1986 forum in Denver.

[49] "The 'real' AIM stands up," *Colorado Daily*, February 19, 1986. NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 2.

Bellecourt said AIM supporters should "continue our struggles *here* for our peoples, lands and resources. [emphasis in original]" One would assume Bellecourt defined "here" as the United States, and his following sentence laying out issues from the Black Hills to Big Mountain and the Nisqually fish-ins to the Great Lakes supports the idea. However, Bellecourt includes a passing reference to "the Northwest Territories," and judging by the framing, the usage seems to indicate he is referring to the Canadian province. So confusingly an organization that sought a hemispheric movement in the 1970s was suddenly re-defining its aims to focus on politics north of the Rio Grande when confronted with the conflict in Nicaragua.[50]

Means' involvement was relatively minimal, and the call for warriors was essentially just a publicity stunt for an activist always willing to put his face in the media. Three months later in Denver, MISURASATA leader Brooklyn Rivera claimed Miskitus did not want Means' warriors, stating that the organization had their own fighters and needed aid more than anything. Rivera also argued that the Miskitus had the ability to police their own territory, claimed there were no Contras currently operating in the area, and MISURASATA would keep the Contras out of the regions they controlled if the Nicaraguan government granted them autonomy.[51] Even though the real world results were almost non-existent, the divide within AIM and the issues it fostered were very real. AIM's goals of expanding internationally had fallen into a morass of arguments that did nothing to move the issue forward. In contrast, the National Indian Youth Council had a

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[50] AIM Press Release, November 13, 1985, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 5.

[51] Jennie Vanderwall, "Brooklyn Rivera/Russell Means Presentation Notes," February 16, 1986, Robert Robideau Papers, Box 10, Folder 19, 4. Rivera's claim about no Contra activity led the audience to disagree to a considerable degree according to Vanderwall's notes.

more engaged campaign that sought to bring real world results to the conflict, but nevertheless still found itself stuck within the political binaries of the Cold War that left little room for an indigenous point of view.

The National Indian Youth Council's Role in Nicaragua

Nicaragua and the conflicts between the Sandinista government and the Miskitu Indians of the eastern coast was the Youth Council's most involved campaign during the decade. The NIYC first became active in Nicaragua shortly after the overthrow of the Somoza government, but it took a much larger role as a neutral arbitrator in negotiations between the Sandinistas and the Miskitos beginning around 1984. According to a proposal created in 1985 to secure additional funding for another round of negotiations between MISURASATA and the Sandinistas, the NIYC noted it was working essentially as MISURASATA's international representative, not only coordinating meetings and promoting the goals of the movement but also preparing position papers and legal documents for the negotiations.[52]

In preparation for the negotiations in Bogota, which sought to resolve the conflict and provide autonomy for the Miskitu communities, the NIYC drafted a funding proposal seeking $25,000 to continue assisting the Miskitus in Nicaragua. The proposal paralleled the writings of the IITC and AIM, noting that the events in Central America posed considerable significance outside of Nicaragua as "Indians across the hemisphere are looking to the talks to see if they can effectively survive as a people under a leftist

[52] "Proposal to Continue to Provide Assistance to the Indians in Nicaragua in Their Effort to Negotiate a Peace Settlement with the Sandinista Government," undated, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 10, 3.

regime. If the talks are unsuccessful the implications for the pan-hemispheric Indian movement are enormous."[53] If that were the ultimate result and the talks failed to secure an agreement between the two sides, "Indian organizations and movements across the Hemisphere will spawn a new generation of leadership that will be convinced that Indians cannot survive in the nation-state regardless of whatever regime is in power."[54] As such, contrary to claims by many of the NIYC's critics, the group saw the Miskitu protest as an integral component of a successful Sandinista revolution and aligned Indigenous movements with the promises of leftist revolutions in the Americas. In contrast, Russell Means, speaking with the Denver-based *Camp Crier* ahead of the second round of Bogota negotiations, argued that the significance of the activities on the eastern coast lay not in securing Indigenous issues within nation-states, but putting Indigenous politics beyond the reach of individual governments. According to Means, "If we as Indian peoples can ally ourselves and form cohesive bonds…no single country will have the might to deny our rights as peoples."[55]

The involvement, however successful Executive Director Gerald Wilkinson proclaimed it to be in mailings, was highly contentious with the organization's supporters, both Native and non-Native. Writing to a large donor in December 1984, Wilkinson noted that James Anaya, a staff attorney for the organization who was fluent in Spanish, had been serving as a personal attorney for Brooklyn Rivera, and his support was "invaluable" at a meeting between the Sandinistas and Rivera's MISURASATA

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[53] Ibid., 2.

[54] Ibid, 8.

[55] *Camp Crier*, April 1985, 6, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 13.

organization earlier in the month. Nevertheless, Wilkinson went on to note that the organization had run into problems securing support from church groups that had previously been fundamental backers of the organization's initiatives. While the groups "greatly prais[ed] the meeting after the fact," they "totally backed off from being involved in anyway" because they feared "losing their image with leftist groups." Most annoyingly for Wilkinson was the "ecclesiastical mystery" of why church groups would not support policies in Nicaragua that were comparable to their goals in the United States. Wilkinson further said that even though the groups distanced themselves from the meeting and the document in order to keep face with fellow liberals in the United States, many of the groups were now trying to "take credit for its success." Wilkinson's letter highlights both the heavy involvement of the Youth Council in the country and the growing unease the organization had with liberal supporters, something that would continue to plague the organization's involvement in the conflict over the next few years.[56]

The most controversial moment for the NIYC's involvement in the Nicaraguan affair came in 1985 when Wilkinson wrote an appeal letter to donors with the central focus being the Miskitu Indians. Wilkinson clearly hoped to gain support by noting that a liberal clergy member spat on him and decried the organization by saying, "You Indians are just anybody's dog who wants to walk you!" However, the real centerpiece of the letter for many on the NIYC mailing list was the claim that the situation in Nicaragua was

[56] Gerald Wilkinson, Letter to Ann Maytag, December 20, 1984. National Indian Youth Council Records, 1935-2000, The University of New Mexico, Center for Southwest Research, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Box 21, Folder 16.

as bad as what was going on in Guatemala. That one line, tucked in the middle of the letter, drew a huge response from potential donors with many decrying the naiveté of the organization and refusing to donate. A typical example is Lynn Sonfield, who responded to the letter by noting the comparison was "an obscene distortion in light of the massive massacres and torture of Indians which have been official Guatemalan policy for years." Another letter writer asked to be dropped from the membership rolls and said he would be sending his donations to the Native Rights Fund, "which seems to know what it's doing. I doubt that you do….Ridiculous, not to say shameful."[57] Responses like Sonfield's poured into the Youth Council offices for the rest of 1985. While many of them were little more than hand written notes on the donation card with the absurd notation that the NIYC was a CIA front group, many more letters arrived signed, most coming from either California or the Northeast.[58]

In addition to viewing NIYC policies as too friendly towards the Contras, writers such as Charles Myers of Michigan argued the organization had not achieved native rights in the United States and had no business getting involved in foreign affairs when

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[57] Lynn Sonfield, Letter to Gerald Wilkinson, NIYC Records, Box 22, Folder 1; Victor Pasche letter to NIYC, NIYC Records, Box 22, Folder 1.

[58] The geographic distribution of letters into the NIYC office fits with the general breakdown of where the Nicaraguan issue was the most popular. Christian Smith in *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* utilized the University of Texas's Central America Resource Center's *Directory of Central America Organizations* and found that the Northeastern United States and states bordering Mexico accounted for thirty-two percent of all organizations advocating for Nicaraguan issues. New Mexico, where the NIYC was headquartered, had 14 organizations, which was outside the top fifteen for raw numbers, but ranked eighth per capita with one organization per every 106,000 residents. Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, 1996, 288, 390. The various responses to the NIYC mailings can be found throughout the NIYC Papers, in particular folder 22, boxes 1-7.

tribes in the United States had pressing issues. While the NIYC of the 1980s argued native rights did not end at national borders, the basic criticism would have been well received by previous NIYC leadership, which established the organization with the firm goal of improving local issues first and foremost. Clyde Warrior, the founder of the Youth Council, often referred to indigenous movements outside the United States and regularly invoked anti-colonial ideas in his speeches, as did many Indigenous activists situating themselves within the rhetoric of the Cold War.[59] Yet, as one biographer noted, "He would never openly [call] for a unity of purpose across international lines the way that the [National Congress of American Indians] and later AIM did. His focus was on more immediate matters closer to home.[60] As a result, the shifting goals left the organization open for criticism that it had failed to meet its fundamental mission. Dean Chavers, who took part in the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, made the criticism the centerpiece of a December 1986 editorial entitled "Where Are Our Leaders?" that appeared in *News from Indian Country*. Chavers highlighted serious needs in Indian country, including jobs, housing, sovereignty, education, and healthcare, but noted many leaders had "become more concerned with what is going on with the Indians of Nicaragua or El Salvador…than they are about their own people." Getting involved overseas was not only a "waste of time" when reservations had seventy percent

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[59] For examples of native activism and the Cold War see Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) and Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008).

[60] Paul R. McKenzie-Jones, *Clyde Warrior: Tradition, Community, and Red Power* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 83.

unemployment, but to him it smacked of paternalism to have "more advanced Natives of the U.S….helping our 'poor' brothers in the Amazon jungle."[61]

Wilkinson's and the NIYC's frustration with attacks on their Nicaragua position came to a head in February 1986, when a majority of the outgoing NIYC messages were related to Nicaragua.[62] His arguments were largely centered upon needing to take a more nuanced view of the Nicaraguan conflict that removed it from the political divide in American politics. First, Indians had to acknowledge that people like Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson may have done an enormous amount for the country but they were still terrible in regards to Indians; the same could be said in regards to Sandinista policies, which may ultimately benefit Nicaragua but were hurting the Miskitus. Secondly, the Miskitus were asking for the same thing Indians in the U.S. were seeking, the autonomy to govern their own affairs, and he noted many tribal leaders at a recent NCAI meeting said they would reject a plan similar to the Sandinistas' if it were proposed in the United States because it was "nothing the most patriotic flag waving tribal council in the US could support."[63] While it is impossible to figure out how effective these letters were in

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[61] Dean Chavers, "Where Are Our Leaders?", *News from Indian Country*, December 31, 1986.

[62] Outgoing Mail Log, February 12-18 1986, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 6. The log lists only two letters relating to the NIYC's voter registration efforts and another letter relating to indigenous issues in the Andes of South America. The remaining 23 letters related to Nicaragua. Wilkinson also notes in a letter dated February 10, 1986 that up to that point the organization had received fifteen letters criticizing the organization's position. Gerald Wilkinson letter to Lois Remple, February 10, 1986, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 1, 1.

[63] Gerald Wilkinson, various letters to National Indian Youth Council supporters, NIYC Records, Box 22, Folder 1. Many of the letters recycle the same basic points but his letter to Mr. and Mrs. Watts from April 1, 1986 is the most detailed and was largely used here.

rebutting the criticisms, it is worth noting that of the letters saved in the NIYC files only two are follow-ups providing donations and thanking Wilkinson for his clarification.

The organization also produced a document entitled "Common Misconceptions about the Indian Situation in Nicaragua" that included many of Wilkinson's points but expanded them while addressing the five major criticisms leveled against the organization. The unsigned document begins by downplaying the Sandinista acknowledgement that errors were committed in regards to the Miskitus, noting the government "found an effective smokescreen with an extremely loyal and ideological following willing to buy into it." However, the forced relocations, rapes, burning of villages, torturing, and arbitrary arrests "can hardly be passed off as mere mistakes."[64] Wilkinson also expressed consternation with the idea that the NIYC was supporting the Contras or Reagan's conservative politics, writing to one member that the Youth Council withheld support for Misursata at first because they "could not believe that a progressive government that we supported…could possibly have a policy that was so damaging to our people."[65]

Furthermore, the organization argued that none of the human rights reports that provided a basis for arguing issues in the region could not be trusted because of limited access to the region and an overall attitude of fear on part of many Indians to testify

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[64] "Common Misconceptions About the Indian Situation in Nicaragua," Unsigned and dated NIYC document, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 1.

[65] Gerald Wilkinson letter to E. Perry Winston, February 10, 1986, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 1, 4.

against the Sandinistas.[66] The document also countered claims that the Sandinistas had begun a ceasefire, implemented an autonomy program, and allowed Miskitus to return to the Río Coco region. The NIYC argued that the autonomy program was a program imposed from above that had little support from average Miskitus and had "little regard for traditional forms of Indian self-government which the Indian people of the Atlantic coast are seeking to regain."[67] On ability to return to the Río Coco region, the organization argued the policy weakened any ability of the Sandinistas to claim the forced relocations were meant to protect the Miskitus in the first place because fighting was still going on in the region when people began returning from relocation camps. Finally, and most importantly for the NIYC if it wanted to regain the support of its former liberal allies, the group argued that MISURASATA was not affiliated with the Contras, noting that President Daniel Ortega's willingness to negotiate with the government was evidence that the Sandinistas in Managua understood the movement was about land, rather than ideology.

The next major attempt to gain support for MISURASATA came in the latter half of 1985 and into 1986 and 1987 with the formation of the Pana Pana support organization. While Pana Pana, meaning "to help each other" in Miskitu, came out of conversations at the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva, Switzerland, during the summer of 1985, the organization was primarily the work of the Youth Council and extended their programs from the previous half decade. The group hoped to

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[66] "Common Misconceptions about the Indian Situation in Nicaragua," NIYC Records, Box 22, Folder 1, 1-2.

[67] Ibid., 4.

raise $10,000 for a unity meeting of MISURASATA, MISURA, and the Indigenous Creole Council, but its main goal in the long-term appeared to be focused on publicity as evidenced by a memo that noted it would promote "a full range of public support activities, including preparing materials, organizing speaking engagements, letter writing campaigns, and other support activities requested by MISURASATA."[68] The initial mailing list for the organization, numbering just over 400 people and organizations, was largely geared towards an international audience, with a majority of the mailings sent to Europe along with Canada, Australia, and various countries in South America.[69]

While Pana Pana produced one newsletter and various alert mailings during 1986 and 1987, the response was minimal at best. In August 1987 an organizer provided statistics on requests for information that arose from various mailings and ad campaigns over the previous year. The initial mailing in fall of 1985 that went out to over 1000 people brought in only twenty-three responses. Returns for other communications were roughly the same, with the fall 1986 newsletter receiving the most responses. While twenty-one people requested additional information (packets, videotapes, audio) only four provided contributions or allowed their name to be used in some capacity.[70] The end result was no response from organizations it had hoped to use to build a network, only $400 in donations, and over $4000 in debts between expenses (that needed to be

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[68] Joe Ryan, "Confidential Memorandum," August 16, 1985. NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 14.

[69] Memo to Marti Roberge and Joe Ryan from James Anaya, October 4, 1985, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 14. Mailing addresses can be found in NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 21.

[70] "Re: Update on PANA PANA activities," NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 21, 2.

reimbursed) and a loan from Cultural Survival.[71] The Youth Council ultimately covered all of the expenditures, and Pana Pana itself was in no position to give direct aid to MISURASATA until the outreach efforts brought in more funds.[72] The group never managed to achieve that goal. Two years after it began, Pana Pana produced a funding proposal that indicated it had "helped a little bit with funding of MISURASATA's phone and travel expenses" but had "missed numerous opportunities to support MISURASATA" and operated on a budget of less than a $7,000. The group was largely focused on expanding its network, writing that it saw "Indian organizations, churches, moderate Democrat and Republican elected officials" as fertile ground for organizing in support of MISURASATA.[73] As usual, the vast majority of expenses would go towards funding the publication of the newsletter, but the important facet of this new network was that Pana Pana, and by extension the Youth Council, had begun to see moderates rather than liberals and leftists as the biggest potential source of income for the movement.

The role of church groups in the Nicaraguan campaign was a central complaint by both the NIYC and Native sovereignty expert Hank Adams, who travelled to Nicaragua with Russell Means and provided information to the NIYC. Writing in February 1986 after returning from Nicaragua, Adams expanded on Wilkinson's issues with liberal church groups by saying he knew many religious groups "place their faith and belief in another quarter, namely in the government of Nicaragua." Adams noted he had been

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[71] "Re: PANA PANA activities update," May 13, 1986, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 24, 3.

[72] Ibid., 4.

[73] "Proposal Funding for Pana Pana an International Miskito, Sumo, and Rama Support Group," June 1987, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 21.

allied with many of those people in the past, but now he felt that they had abandoned their moral positions for the convenient alliances of leftist politics. Adams asked his former allies, especially Christians, "Friends, sisters, brothers: Have none of you the decency left, in God's Name, to ask your Sandinista friends, 'Stop the bombing.'? Will none of you stand to demand of them, 'End the War against the Miskito.'?"[74] He went on to demand that the liberal churches, "Revert to [their] conscience and moral code; Restore your moral voice."[75] While Means moved towards libertarian politics and toured the country with the Moonies, Adams was the only activist to really endorse positions on par with those the Reagan administration articulated. In the typed diary of his trip to Nicaragua, Adams claimed the Sandinista "communists" were using a reign of terror to control the eastern coast and could resort to "a Cambodian model of blood-letting and decimation of the Miskito people," and his first order of business upon returning would be to ensure the Miskitos save Central America from the communists.[76] He made his position even clearer when he concluded the release by exclaiming, "Creating a communist hell of inhumanity and heartless horrors, the Sandinistas have extend their bombing schedule to Sundays….Misurasata…must be furnished all necessary armaments & weapons of defense – to halt the monstrous, maniacal, madness of Sandinista Marxists!!"[77]

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[74] Hank Adams press release, February 21, 1986, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 5.

[75] Hank Adams, testimony on Nicaragua involvement, February 1986, NIYC Records, Box 22, Folder 1

[76] "Jungle diary of Hank Adams," February 1986, NIYC Papers, Box 23, Folder 5, 2.

[77] Ibid., 4.

Adams provides an interesting comparison to the other groups involved in Nicaragua because, unlike the others, he took a hardline position opposed to the Sandinistas, and many times positioned himself on the conservative end of the spectrum. In announcing a campaign to showcase photographs of issues documented during the trip to Nicaragua, Adams hoped the tour would involve churches across the country and a "continuing public prayer vigil" that he "promised the villagers who saved our lives would be undertaken in their behalf." The use of prayer was obviously tied to the deep communal connections of the Moravian Church across the eastern provinces but also a way of pulling in groups that were heavily involved in the Nicaraguan discussion. As Christian Smith highlights, liberation theology was a critical facet of promoting the Sandinista revolution and merging Christian ideology with revolutionary politics. In addition to having a handful of Catholic priests serving in the Nicaraguan government, liberal U.S. Christians viewed the events in Nicaraguan as a guiding light and "an experiment and a sign of hope" in the process of reforming American society.[78] Many of those church groups organized tours to Nicaragua to experience the new realities on the ground, and their experiences shaped opinions back in the United States, including responses to the Youth Council's mailing. Jo Ellen Davis wrote to Wilkinson that some of her friends had gone to Nicaragua to learn the "real truth" and returned to tell her that mistakes had been made but the issues were being corrected.[79]

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[78] Ed Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace: A Story of Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), quoted in ibid., 147.

[79] Jo Ellen Davis, letter to Gerald Wilkinson, October 21, 1985.

While the Youth Council devoted most of its international energies in the 1980s to Nicaragua, the involvement was not out of line for the group which increasingly saw international activism as the way forward. Jim Anaya, who was fluent in Spanish, made a number of fact-finding journeys to Latin America during the 1980s. Over the course of the decade he made trips to Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The Youth Council's files include a number of detailed summaries of the visits, although many of them are less than complete because Anaya found himself getting bored with a number of the subjects interviewed. The Guatemala trip, carried out over two and a half weeks in 1986, was one of the most expansive Anaya undertook. Underwritten by Cultural Survival, Inc., the trip included meetings with various Native representatives (including one Anaya and the other non-Native representatives on the trip suspiciously viewed as non-Native until they visited his community), along with governmental and non-native officials. While most of the information included in the archives is Anaya's narratives and summaries of his fact-finding trips, they provide little indication of NIYC's motives or recommendations for further actions. Nevertheless, the trips did prove fruitful for Indigenous people. In January 1987 the Inter-American Foundation provided just over sixty-nine thousand dollars to the Shuar Federation in Ecuador to continue land-titling efforts in the region. According to Chuck Kleymeyer, the IAF representative for Ecuador, a major factor in the IAF's decision to extend additional funds to the organization was Anaya's detailed reports from the region, a letter of support for the project, and his credentials as a lawyer for the Youth Council.

For the Youth Council, and Ramiro Reynaga, a Bolivian activist and NIYC board member, the future of the organization at the end of the 1980s centered firmly on further

extending the organization's involvement in the international arena. In addition to calling for additional support of "brother" Rivera through backing for whatever policies the Miskitus decided on, Reynaga saw the importance of an organizational doctrine of principles not only for Nicaragua but also for the Americas as a whole. This doctrine would not only ensure that native voices were heard in the western nation-state debates that tended to exclude indigenous voices, but it would also continue the process of building on concepts of "holistic" and "oneness" and what Reynaga saw as the inevitable decline of the nation-state overall. As Reynaga concluded, "Sooner or later we will not be able to afford the lack of our own ideological tool for freedom fight."[80] Finally, Reynaga also sought to move beyond Latin America. With the arrival of the five-hundredth anniversary of the conquest of the Americas, Reynaga saw fertile ground to cultivate alliances with European youths who felt "embarrassed by the 'glorious deeds' of their colonizer ancestors." Reynaga also highlighted the possibility for solidarity with marginalized groups, particularly Andalusian and Catalan nationalists upset with Spain's winning the 1992 Olympics and the World Exposition.

Conclusion

In 1990 the Sandinistas held open elections in Nicaragua that culminated in Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas' losing power to a collection of political parties, including former Contras. Within the eastern coast of Nicaragua, YATAMA, a combination of MISURASATA and Miskitu organizations headquartered in Honduras and Costa Rica won nearly half of the seats up for election, essentially splitting the seats

[80] Ramiro Reynaga Letter, March 29, 1988, NIYC Records, Box 20, Folder 49.

with the Sandinistas.[81] While progressives despaired over the rise of a conservative government funded in large part by the U.S. Congress, Jim Anaya's reporting for the Youth Council heralded the results, not only for YATAMA and its successes in comparison to the limited timeframe it had to organize but also the policies implemented by the new government of Violeta Chamorro. Chamorro authorized the creation of the Nicaraguan Institute for Development of the Autonomous Regions (INDERA) and appointed Rivera the head of the new cabinet level position. Anaya grouped the successes with the "winds of change" sweeping the globe during the fall of the Soviet Union and argued that while the new positions could be co-opted and exploited by the new government, Miskitus were now tasked with the new structures, "which are not of their own design, work for a future that *is* of their making."[82]

At the time of YATAMA's rise to power, the NIYC was dealing with the passing of Wilkinson, who died a year earlier after a heart attack at the age of fifty.[83] The Nicaraguan conflict, while the major issue for the organization, was a matter of confusion for those who took over running the group during the next decade. In a series of letters in 1996, Vine Deloria, Jr. and Ned LaCroix, the new executive director, attempted to get to the root of Wilkinson's desire to insert the organization into the Nicaraguan conflict. Deloria noted that during the 1980s he supported the Sandinistas because "I wanted one country that didn't give a damn about taking orders from the American State Department

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[81] James Anaya, "A Report on Recent Developments Including Indian Participation in the February, 1990 Elections," Report prepared for the National Indian Youth Council, July 1990, NIYC Papers, Box 22, Folder 2, 5.

[82] Ibid., 9.

[83] *New York Times*, May 2, 1989.

and the CIA." The position led Deloria to get into arguments with Wilkinson and others because, according to Deloria, both "were straddling the fence in some weird manner that suggested they knew considerably more about the situation than they were letting on."[84] In a follow-up letter, Deloria elaborated that "if you were paying attention to Indian affairs in the U.S., you didn't have time to deal with events overseas. So where did Gerry get the background to understand this situation and know so much detail about it?"[85] The matter, was largely left at that, with the biggest segment of the organization's activity for the last decade as a confusing question of loyalties both politically and to Indians in the United States.

Richard Nixon once told Donald Rumsfeld that Central America "doesn't matter. Long as we've been in it, people don't give one damn about Central America." But for Native American activists, along with the United States as a whole, Central America in the 1980s could not have been more important.[86] Activists from across the spectrum overwhelmingly agreed on basic principles: the importance of solidarity across international boundaries, the significance of upholding sovereignty for indigenous groups in Nicaragua, and the need for the success of the Sandinista revolution. Yet, throughout the decade, groups and individuals failed to agree on how this could best be accomplished. While the Youth Council, Russell Means, and Hank Adams aligned themselves with more conservative elements and argued for unwavering support of

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[84] Vine DeLoria, Jr. letter to Edward LaCroix, March 13, 1996, NIYC Papers, Box 4, Folder 4.

[85] Vine Deloria Jr. letter to Edward LaCroix, April 2, 1996, NIYC Papers, Box 4, Folder 4.

[86] Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 1.

MISURASATA and a hardline towards the Sandinistas, they found themselves ridiculed by many others in the United States. Given the basic fact that both sides agreed on the underlying principles, it seems that the differences could have been handled without a protracted and contentious debate. However, the clash of personalities that had long dominated the Indian Movement in the United States ensured that what could have been a simple problem would turn into an issue and that would divide the organizations for years to come. While Nicaragua took a conservative turn after the Sandinistas lost power in the 1990 elections, in large part thanks to YATAMA and Miskitu support, the Youth Council receded from public view, and AIM would find itself split into numerous new autonomous chapters, each of which would claim to be the rightful heir to the legacies of the Red Power era.

CHAPTER V

THE PAPER WARS: AIM AND THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY

1992 marked the quincentennial of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas and the anniversary was meet with widespread demonstrations by Indigenous peoples across the western hemisphere. The *Los Angeles Times,* writing on the events in Latin America, stated, "never has so much publicity been given to so many meetings, manifestos, protests, and demands by native peoples in the former New World colonies of Spain and Portugal."[1] While the paper and some activists felt the protests had caused a lot of noise and little action, 1992 witnessed the Organization of American States drafting a declaration of Indigenous rights, the creation of a development fund for Indigenous peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Earth Summit that saw world leaders endorse support for Indigenous cultures and identities. The United Nations furthermore proclaimed 1993 to be the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples. Speaking at the opening ceremonies inaugurating the year of indigenous peoples, U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali heralded the "welcome change…taking place at national and international levels" that witnessed Indigenous

[1] "A New Call for Indian Activists," *Los Angeles Times,* February 9, 1993. LaDonna Harris Papers and Americans for Indian Opportunity Records, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research. Box 86A, Folder 6.

peoples becoming "active in seeking improvements in their situations."[2] The opening ceremonies witnessed ceremonial prayers followed by testimonies by over twenty speakers, opening a year that sought to expand the international understanding of Native issues.[3]

While 1992 and 1993 marked a "boom time" for public understanding of native issues according to the *Los Angeles Times,* the following year witnessed the United States' most well-known native activist group tearing itself in two as competing factions sought to control the direction of the American Indian Movement. Thirty years after the occupation of Wounded Knee and a decade after cracks began to show over the conflict in Nicaragua, the 1990s saw AIM supporters split into the National American Indian Movement headquartered in Minneapolis and the AIM-International Confederation of Autonomous Chapters based in Denver. Members of both factions at first attempted to keep the conflict internal, but the schism spilled into the open and played out both in the pages of *News from Indian Country,* the leading native news source in the United States, and a public tribunal in March 1994 organized by the Colorado faction to try Clyde and Vernon Bellecourt for alleged crimes against the movement. While much of the conflict was fueled by the large personalities of its participants, the proceedings during the early 1990s both bring to an end the division created by the Nicaraguan conflict and highlight

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[2] "Secretary-General Calls for Respect and Tolerance to Secure Human and Community Rights of Indigenous Peoples," Indigenous Peoples Media Center Press Release, December 10, 1992. LaDonna Harris Papers and Americans for Indian Opportunity Records, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research. Box 86A, Folder 6.

[3] "Native People Address United Nations: 'International Year of World's Indigenous Peoples' kicked off," *News from Indian Country,* January 15, 1993.

how AIM and activism found itself caught up in many of the debates in Indian Country about the nature of what it meant to be Indian during the period.

The tribunal in 1994 arose, in part, because of AIM's decentralized organizational structure. Following Wounded Knee, the group had various national directors, including Dennis Banks and John Trudell, who had run the Indians of All Tribes radio station during the occupation of Alcatraz. However, after Trudell's wife and three children died in a house fire that many claimed was politically motivated, the national director position was eliminated for the safety of whomever was in the position and to make it harder to destroy the organization through arrests and surveillance. Yet, while AIM members regularly proclaimed that the organization did not have a national structure after 1979, the group still operated as a single entity. A history of the group in the early 1980s outlined various issues of focus in the new decade ranging from the international to the regional and local level. The latter included further strengthening of local chapters, all of which, the document noted, "must be approved by the National General Council."[4] At the same time, the IITC broke away from the movement, operating on its own, albeit with the cross-over of various activists. Yet, for many it remained the international arm of AIM.

While AIM had its internal issues throughout the 1980s, it still remained a divisive organization for many American Indians, especially older, more traditional groups. Furthermore, while AIM sought to create a pan-Indian alliance that incorporated all tribal nations, there remained considerable skepticism about the abilities of the organization's perceived leaders. When Dennis Banks ended his self-imposed exile in the

[4] "The American Indian Movement Policies," A.I.M. Non-aligned Summit Meeting, January 1982. Robideau Papers, Box 21, Folder 20.

mid-1980s and surrendered to authorities in South Dakota for the charges that arose from the occupation of Wounded Knee, one "full-blooded Minneconjou woman" was quoted as saying, "…send that rice-eater Banks back to Minnesota." In addition, the woman added about the legal proceeding related to Native prisoner Leonard Peltier, "Who gives a damn about Peltier?"[5] Others expressed issues with AIM's alleged disrespect and antics that they saw as inappropriate for a native rights movement, "When AIM first started we were all for it.…But then those AIMsters starting mistreating our young students. Russell Means dropped the flag a woman had given him that had covered the coffin of her son killed in Vietnam. If they got new leadership we might listen to them."[6] An unsigned chronicle of the events in 1984 concluded by saying that even though AIM had been around for close to twenty years, by the mid-1980s, "AIM was still struggling in its original and awkward way towards understanding the true Indian Way, the correct path of The Red Road. It was no longer infantile but it was perhaps still adolescent."[7]

Various attempts were made during the 1980s to construct a more defined movement. Significantly, in 1987 various members of AIM convened a meeting in Colorado under the organization of the Colorado AIM branch to address the future structure of the movement and re-constitute a national AIM. The group concluded AIM would have a national structure centered around an Elder's Council, with a National

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[5] "A New AIM? Eight Days in October," undated. Robideau Papers, Box 21, Folder 20, 9.

[6] "A New AIM? Eight Days in October," undated. Robideau Papers, Box 21, Folder 20, 8.

[7] "A New AIM? Eight Days in October," undated. Robideau Papers, Box 21, Folder 20, 8.

Governing Council serving as the executive branch under the guidance of the Elder's Council. From there, AIM would be broken up into various regional chapters and then further into individual local chapters. The group also unanimously decided that the new AIM governing body needed to reconstitute and recognize the local AIM chapters "on a formal basis."[8] While some of the changes appear to be part of AIM's attempt to claim responsibility for things that had previously been present, the meeting highlighted the growing divide within AIM. The report of the proceedings noted that the changes would allow the new group to address the perceived issues that had lead AIM to stray from its original goals. The group explicitly pointed to six major issues:

> A default on leadership marked by the development of personality cults and ego tripping.
>
> The widespread use of alcohol and drugs (as well as sales of drugs) among many AIM members at all levels.
>
> Failure to communicate with grassroots people.
>
> Support of nation-state governments at the direct expense of Indian nations.
>
> Adoption of non-Indian ideologies.
>
> Leftwing type factionalism by expulsions of members and the public airing of differences.[9]

While many found it ironic that Russell Means would endorse a proposal that labelled ego-tripping a problem, the second half of the list is particularly important to note. Bill Means attended the meeting and listed himself as representing Minneapolis and the IITC, but the issues have the clear mark of AIM's Colorado chapter. Even though the debate

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[8] "A Call for The Reconstitution of the American Indian Movement," undated. Robideau Papers, Box 23, Folder 14, 3, 4.

[9] "A Call for The Reconstitution of the American Indian Movement," undated. Robideau Papers, Box 23, Folder 14, 4.

over the Miskitus is not explicitly mentioned, the document, which is marked for internal use only, opened with a quote from Nicaragua Indians that read, "Only Indians help Indians." The division, however, was readily apparent in the group demanding that the IITC "must be returned to their proper role within AIM, under direction of the Elders Circle and National Governing Council." Calling it "the highest priority," the new AIM sought to return the IITC to being "the international diplomatic arm of the American Indian Movement." Even though the document applauds the "excellent" work of the IITC, it lays out that until the IITC is re-incorporated within AIM, "no further actions, international delegations and the like by IITC will be recognized as reflecting the positions and interests of AIM."[10] Given the position of Colorado AIM versus the Treaty Council's early embrace of the the Sandinistas, it seems as if Colorado AIM were attempting to shift the movement towards their view of the decade's events.

Tensions between the competing factions in Colorado and Minneapolis would continue to rise throughout the next half decade, with both sides claiming the other sought to undermine the movement and co-opt it for its own purposes. The end result was a tribunal publicly by the Autonomous AIM chapters but largely spearheaded by Colorado AIM and members close to Russell Means and Ward Churchill. The new group wrote up a twenty-eight-page indictment that laid out eight "crimes against the organization" committed by Vernon and Clyde Bellecourt. The charges ranged from misappropriation of funds and drug use to subversion of the movement and complicity in genocide and high treason. The main points of criticism against both Bellecourt brothers

[10] "A Call for The Reconstitution of the American Indian Movement," undated. Robideau Papers, Box 23, Folder 14, 5.

centered on their views on Nicaragua and their criticism of Ward Churchill. The eight charges included seventy-one evidentiary points for Vernon and twenty-six for Clyde. For both brothers, issues related to Churchill and Nicaragua were the most cited; Vernon's indictment including twelve points related to Churchill and thirteen related to Nicaragua. While Clyde's had only one mention of Churchill, six of the twenty-six points related to Nicaragua. As a whole, the two issues accounted for thirty-five percent of the criticism against Vernon and twenty-seven against Clyde. While neither constituted a majority, it is impossible to read the indictment documents written for the tribunal and not interpret them as a referendum on AIM's position on Nicaragua and the role of Churchill within the movement.[11]

Ward Churchill had been involved in various aspects of native activism, particularly with the Denver AIM chapter, since the 1970s and served as a professor at the University of Colorado-Boulder. At various times he has claimed Cherokee, Creek, and Métis ancestry and noted his enrolled status with the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma. Neither the Cherokee nor Creek Nations have Churchill listed on their tribal rolls, and the Keetoowah Band stated in 2005 that Churchill's enrollment in the tribe was an "honorary associate membership" and did not denote

[11] "International Confederation of Autonomous Chapters of the American Indian Movement v. Vernon Bellecourt and Clyde Bellecourt: Indictment and Statement of Charges," Robert Robideau Papers, Box 19, Folder 29. It should be noted that many have claimed the murder of indigenous activist Anne Mae Aquash played a significant role in the divide within the group (See "Aquash Murder Case: AIM leaders point fingers at each other," *News from Indian Country,* November 4, 1999 among others). While the indictment claims both Bellecourts attempted to order Aquash murdered, the issue only received one point of emphasis within the indictment.

enrollment in the tribe.[12] Churchill received considerable support during the period when his ancestry was questioned, and many supporters dismissed the charges as ridiculous.[13] Furthermore, one letter to the editor printed in *NFIC* argued that the term "wannabe" did not have to be a negative one. J.D Whitney wrote that while a wannabe could be involved in "cultural imperialism that appropriates Native traditions and spirituality," it could also mean, in their view, "living a life committed to social justice, multi-cultural survival and integrity, and the active defense of Native Peoples rights to self-determination." Whitney does not provide a note on their background but concludes the letter by noting that if being a "wannabe" meant learning from Native Americans how "to live honorably, carefully, and intelligently in the place we call North America-then, yes, I'll be a wannabe."[14]

Ward Churchill's alleged Indian ancestry became a center-piece of the criticism against the Colorado AIM chapter and reflected a larger movement among Native Americans to challenge perceived "wannabee" Indians that began in earnest in the 1980s with guidance from Cherokee Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller. As Mark Edwin Miller documents in *Claiming Tribal Identity,* the second half of the twentieth century saw a rapid rise in self-proclaimed tribes claiming indigenous ancestry, with a large minority of those alleging some connection to one or more of the five major tribal nations removed to

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[12] Mark Edwin Miller, *Claiming Tribal Identity: The Five Tribes and the Politics of Federal Acknowledgment* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 290-291. Bill Clinton is another example of an associate member of the United Keetoowah Band.

[13] See various usenet posts in Robideau Papers, Box 21-23. Support for Churchill dropped off considerably after 2001 when he made statements after 9/11 that people who died in the terrorist attack were "little Eichmanns."

[14] "Nobody wants to be a 'wannabe'," *News from Indian Country,* Mid. November 1993.

present-day Oklahoma during the Removal Era.[15] Part of the larger ethnic revival during the twentieth century, the rise of these new groups seemingly added credence to claims by conservative American Indians that AIM and other urban indigenous groups to appear in the 1960s were not actually Native Americans. During the 1960s Cherokee Principal Chief W.W. Keeler and Cherokee Nation attorney Earl Boyd Pierce saw the new movements as a threat to traditional tribal governments and lumped both unrecognized tribes and activist organizations together as illegitimate Native entities in a campaign to undermine their position in Indian Country.[16]

The Churchill issue would surface thorough-out the lead up to the tribunal. Robert Robideau took the lead on much of the planning for the 1994 tribunal, including reaching out to Native journalists and members of the American Indian community in Minneapolis to build a case against the Bellecourts. In addition, Robideau tried to gain support for the proceedings from individuals and tribes that were ambivalent about the entire process and the threat of further division within the movement. The calls and discussions were, at times, contentious and difficult. In one particular incident at the beginning of March 1994, Robideau had a prolonged conversation with Billy Tayac, the hereditary chief of the Piscataway Indian Nation, a state-recognized tribe in Maryland, and a leader of indigenous activism in the Washington, D.C. area. The conversation centered upon

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[15] See Ibid. Additionally Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) provides a look at the idea of racial shifting from non-Indian to Indian.

[16] Miller, *Claiming Tribal Identity*, 268; See Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), chapter one for an overview of the conflict between Keeler and the new native organizers that appeared in the 1960s.

Tayac's desire to remain neutral in the entire AIM Tribunal affair, arguing that the whole process was simply going to create additional division. Tayac stated, "I am not against anybody but what we are trying to do is get some kind of unity man!"[17] The Autonomous AIM group dismissed the idea that the proceedings as harmful because the group needed to remove those who posed a threat to the movement. Writing in a frequently asked questions, the chapters argued "within our midst there have always been traitors. There have always been those who would sell the birthright of our children and grandchildren…so-called leaders who 'touched the pen' with the Europeans." Furthermore the group claimed they needed to use a western-style tribunal because "the defendants had embraced European values so thoroughly in their actions…that the consequences of a Western-style Tribunal would be clearer to them than would an indigenous forum."[18]

As the conversation grew increasingly heated, with Robideau demanding Tayac take a side, and then claiming he had taken a side by not disowning the Minneapolis group, Mark Tayac joined the conversation and returned to a point Billy Tayac had only passingly mentioned at the start of the call: Ward Churchill. Mark noted that one of the biggest issues the Piscataway Tribe saw was the rise of "a lot of non-Indians posing as Indian people to get benefits. There is an Indian commission here and 7 out of 9 people

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[17] "Transcript of phone with Billy Tyac[sic]," March 1, 1994. Robert E. Robideau American Indian Movement Papers, University of New Mexico. Center for Southwest Research. Box 21, Folder 27, 7.

[18] "Response to Five Frequently Asked Questions About the AIM Confederation Tribunal," Robideau Papers, Box 19, Folder 28.

are people posing as Indian people."[19] When Robideau asked how this related to their refusal to support the tribunal, Tayac made the point clear that there were concerns that Ward Churchill and Glenn Morris were not Indians and the issue needed to be put out in the open and resolved.[20] While Robideau called the issue an "illusion" and a distraction from the main point of Minneapolis AIM's claiming to represent the movement as a whole, the issue of "wannabee Indians" were a serious concern for many Native Americans during the 1980s and 1990s. The fact that the criticism came from a group of non-federally recognized Native Americans makes the issue even more important.

David Bradley, who served as a vice-president of the Native American Artists Association, argues in "The Columbus Syndrome and Ward Churchill, Chief of the Wannabes: A Tribe of the Master Race" that the rise of alleged American Indians threatened to drown out legitimate tribal members from both political and cultural discussions, especially those surrounding the 1992 anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. The process of exclusion, which he termed the Columbus Syndrome, was "a very serious battle in the new high-tech business of cultural genocide," and like a virus, it was unleashed on Native Americans from the inside and threatened to confuse everyone about who the legitimate voices for Indigenous issues were. In addition to Churchill, Bradley noted that both Jimmie Durham and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz had claimed Indigenous heritage but were "whites" masquerading as Native Americans.

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[19] "Transcript of phone with Billy Tyac[sic]," March 1, 1994. Robert E. Robideau American Indian Movement Papers, University of New Mexico. Center for Southwest Research. Box 21, Folder 27, 7.

[20] "Transcript of phone with Billy Tyac[sic]," March 1, 1994. Robideau Papers, Box 21, Folder 27, 8.

Bradley dismissed all the claims and noted that just because many people may be able to find some Indigenous heritage in their family tree, it did not make the United States a nation of Indians. Furthermore, the rise of romanticized Indians in Hollywood pictures such as *Thunderheart* and *Dances With Wolves* meant "any pseudo-Indian white person…can now open their own neighborhood chapter of AIM and call themselves 'co-director'."[21] Additionally, Bradley dismissed the counter-argument by Churchill that his non-enrolled status could not be held against him because Leonard Peltier, AIM's most well-known political prisoner, was also not an enrolled member. Peltier's tribal background was easily identifiable; the background of Churchill, Dunbar-Ortiz, and Durham were not.[22]

Bradley's letter, which originally appeared in the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (LPDC) Newsletter, prompted Ward Churchill to write a fiery letter to Peltier stating he was resigning from the organization for the "sheer political stupidity" of allowing the letter to be printed. He noted that it did more to discredit the LPDC than

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[21] "Excepts from The Columbus Syndrome and Ward Churchill, Chief of the Wannabees: A Tribe of the Master Race," *News from Indian Country*, Late June 1994. *Thunderheart* involved Val Kilmer playing Ray Levoi, a FBI agent with Sioux heritage, sent to the reservation to investigate a murder. Directed by Michael Apted, who also directed the *Incident at Oglala Documentary* that covered the Leonard Peltier situation, it had loose connections to the events on Pine Ridge over the preceding two decades.

[22] Dunbar-Ortiz it should be noted is open about her heritage, writing in her memoirs that the heritage is difficult to trace. According to her she was encouraged to embrace her heritage by Wallace "Mad Bear" Anderson, a Tuscarora activist, in the early 1970s after the occupation of Alcatraz, although she did not begin to fully proclaim an indigenous identity until after Wounded Knee. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War*, Oklahoma paperback edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 15. Durham has maintained he is Cherokee and "many Cherokees are not registered. My family didn't even think about registering," and mirroring Churchill in calling the enrollment process a "tool of apartheid." "The Artist Jimmie Durham: A Long Time Gone, but Welcomed Back," *New York Times,* March 10, 2017. Accessed from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/arts/design/the-artist-jimmie-durham-a-long-time-gone-but-welcomed-back.html (Accessed on July 22, 2017).

Churchill himself, who allegedly had a copious amount of support from both Colorado-AIM and various other AIM members and Wounded Knee veterans. In Churchill's telling, the entire campaign to discredit him was nothing more than a conspiracy by Vernon Bellecourt arising from the Miskitu/Sandinista conflict in the 1980s in which "the Sandinistas and several white leftist organizations up here in the States were paying ol' Vern to side against the Indians down south."[23]

A year before the 1994 tribunal, AIM-Minneapolis formally endorsed its opposition to Churchill's presence as a Native activist. The group coordinated the twentieth-fifth anniversary meeting of the American Indian Movement in Mankato, Minnesota, that saw participation of up to 17,000 Native and non-Native supporters, according to organizers. Minneapolis's AIM leaders noted in response to the tribunal that one of the main points of discussion at the anniversary gathering was the need to address the "wrath" of imposter Indians. While these "shake and bake shamans, phony medicine men and women, artists, writers, and self-proclaimed 'AIM leaders'" may have adopted their identities out of "romanticism, self grandeur, exploitation, [or] greed," the group also claimed it could be part of more coordinated and covert campaigns by the FBI and other government agencies to disrupt the movement.[24] The Minneapolis letter went on to say that Ward Churchill and Glenn Morris were the two members who most fit the description of these fake Indians; Churchill responded that the attacks were part of a

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[23] Ward Churchill letter to Leonard Peltier, February 1, 1993, reprinted in *News from Indian Country,* Late July 1994.

[24] "National AIM office says two don't represent movement," *News from Indian Country,* Late December 1993.

"racial purity crusade" and amounted to "racial cleansing."[25] While opposition to federal recognition is a complicated affair, Churchill's position was extreme and at times bordered on violent Mark Edwin Miller noted Churchill had been known to threaten those who questioned his tribal affiliations.[26]

In addition to attempts to push Churchill and others out, the charges against the Bellecourt brothers included a litany of complaints which can be grouped almost entirely under the fact that they allegedly had a much closer relationship with the U.S. federal government than the confederated AIM members believed was warranted. The indictment claimed the brothers took federal money and received funds from corporations such as Honeywell, that went towards the Little Earth housing project, a violation of AIM policies dating back to 1972. More critically, however, the Bellecourts were accused of supporting the Native American Free Exercise of Religion Act (the American Indians Religious Freedoms Act) and the Indian Arts and Crafts Act. Many American Indians and activists within AIM heralded the passage of the Religious Freedoms Act in 1978 as a marquee movement and a sign of AIM's contributions to indigenous rights. Yet, both that act and the Arts and Crafts Act restricted themselves to federally acknowledged tribes, which, as noted, was a point of contention for people like Ward Churchill. In particular the Arts and Crafts Act has received criticism from members of non-recognized tribes as well as artists who were not formally enrolled in any tribe because the law made it a crime to market art as Native American if the artist was not enrolled in a federally

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Miller, *Claiming Tribal Identity*, 294.

recognized tribe.[27] For activists like Churchill, the act was less of an attempt to protest American Indians that further erase them from the cultural landscape by having non-natives in the government decide who was and was not able to be American Indian.

The issues over Ward Churchill and Indigenous identity were deeply connected to his support for the Miskitus in Nicaragua and his (and Colorado AIM as whole) opposition to the Sandinistas. As a result, the International Indian Treaty Council played a significant role in the 1994 proceedings. The indictment claimed the Bellecourts had regularly attempted to subvert and destroy the movement. In one instance the indictment claimed the IITC had the support of the Ba'ath Socialist Party in Iraq in the early 1980s, but after Vernon came out in support of the Iranian government, the Ba'ath withdrew support, undermining both the IITC's finances and reputation.[28]

While the IITC, while classified as part of AIM by some, and a major subsection of the issues related to the schism, choose to remain neutral in the entire tribunal affair. The IITC did, however, write a letter to tribunal organizers right before the proceedings in March 1994 to note what they perceived as "significant misstatements" within the indictment that related to the Bellecourts' alleged subversion of the Treaty Council. The IITC argued that Autonomous AIM's assertions of being co-opted or undermined were false, providing a page of events the IITC had taken part in recently to highlight their

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[27] "Split in AIM leads to Charges," *News from Indian Country,* Mid January 1994.

[28] "International Confederation of Autonomous Chapters of the American Indian Movement v. Vernon Bellecourt and Clyde Bellecourt: Indictment and Statement of Charges," Robert Robideau Papers, Box 19, Folder 29. It should be noted during the Iranian hostage crisis AIM had organized mail delivery for the hostages, which Means attributed to the successes of the IITC, the Geneva conference, and the alliance the organization had with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Russell Means and Marvin J Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 399.

significance to the international indigenous community. In contrast the group noted that the tribunal was primarily an "internal affair," and the event would have "very little consequence internationally for Indigenous peoples and very little bearing on the respect and ongoing work of IITC overall," although they did note some European groups had begun to take part in the debate. Furthermore, the IITC argued issues like Nicaragua were matters of opinion rather than facts, and "to state them as indisputable fact only serves to prolong painful and basically unresolvable differences of opinion. For what good purpose we are not sure, so we will refrain."[29]

The tribunal itself took place in Oakland, California with roughly fifty people in attendance. Vernon refused to attend, arguing the entire event had no legitimate purpose and did not want to give support to the idea. Clyde called the tribunal a "joke" and claimed that AIM chapters in Ohio, Virginia, Florida, and Montana (which were all incorporated and officially recognized by National AIM in Minneapolis) told the Bellecourts they had not signed onto the tribunal charges or been involved with it in any way, but nevertheless attended in the hopes of working out a compromise.[30] However, Clyde's appearance ended shortly after he attempted to offer a pipe ceremony, after which he claims Russell Means became irate. After informing Means, "We don't want you. We don't want you in the Movement," Bellecourt and his supporters left the

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[29] "Re: Tribunal Indictment," International Indian Treaty Council to The Organizers, Judges, and Participants in the "AIM Autonomous Chapters Tribunal," March 21, 1994.

[30] "Bellecourts Summoned for Late March Tribunal," *News from Indian Country,* Late March 1994.

proceedings.[31] Following Bellecourt's appearance at the tribunal, Minneapolis AIM released a statement that the whole proceeding was nothing more than a "bizarre case" put forward by "con artists, ex-cons and non-Indians who know little or nothing about the needs of American Indians. This tribunal is ridiculous."[32]

In addition to Clyde's claims that the opening prayer became contentious, the tribunal ended with a confrontation between Andrea Jaimes, a professor at Colorado, and Carole Standing Elk, a supporter of Minneapolis AIM who showed up to the tribunal press conference to distribute literature in support of the Bellecourts. The confrontation ended with Jaimes and a police officer covered in coffee and competing claims by Churchill and Standing Elk that the other had spat on them during the incident.[33] Furthermore, archival documents include hand-written flyers attacking both Clyde Bellecourt and Floyd Red Crow Westerman, a prominent Indigenous recording artist and AIM member supportive of Minneapolis AIM. The flyers (Figure Three) embrace ideas circulated by the Autonomous AIM chapters that the Bellecourts and their supporters were using the movement for their own benefit. Westerman's poster including his photograph and the caption: "Look new Teeth!" Minneapolis AIM and Clyde Bellecourt responded that it was Russell Means who had sold out the movement, using his fame within it to gain publicity for various presidential campaigns and movie roles, including

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[31] Clyde H. Bellecourt and Jon Lurie, *The Thunder Before the Storm: The Autobiography of Clyde Bellecourt* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016), 285.

[32] "American Indian Movement Frauds Present Bizarre Case at Mock 'Tribunal'," Robideau Papers, Box 19, Folder 28.

[33] "Tribunal Press Conference Ends with Altercation," *News from Indian Country,* Late April 1994.

many that Bellecourt claimed only enhanced native stereotypes Means said he was opposed to.[34]

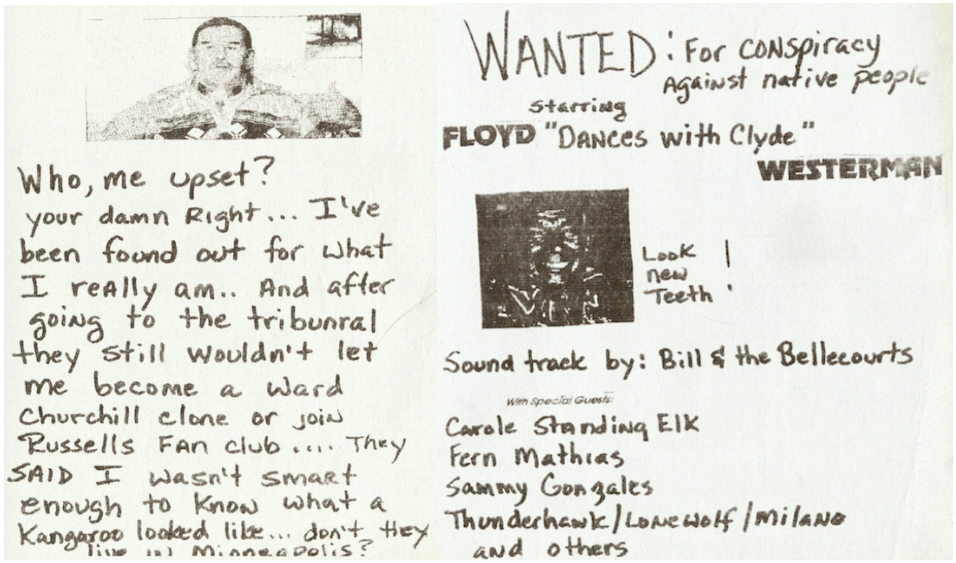

Figure 3: Flyers circulated during 1994 AIM Tribunal (Robideau Papers)

The tribunal proceedings would continue to linger through the rest of the decade, with both sides continuing to accuse the other of various things over time. AIM did not end in 1994, but it was certainly much diminished afterwards. Furthermore, in contrast to the vibrancy of the 1992 celebrations, 1994 overshadowed many of the issues Native American activists sought to solve. In a prophetic statement Dennis Banks told *News from Indian Country* that he wanted no part in the tribunal proceedings because "That's not what I perceive as solving problems for Indian people." He went on to argue that, "When people look at it 20, 30 years from now and say 'What were the big issues?'

[34] ibid., 285. Bellecourt pointed in particular to 1994's *Natural Born Killers,* Oliver Stone's movie about two mass murders in which Means has a small role as an old Navajo who is shot by the main characters while performing a native ceremony.

Fishing rights, sovereignty, some people having a paper war."[35] Now, nearly twenty-five years later Banks' statement is pretty accurate. AIM in the 1990s was certainly focused on various issues at the local level, but at least as far as most people knew, the AIM of 1994 was squabbling amongst each other about who was Native American and who had a right to lead and guide the movement. As commentators noted at the time, little good would come out of the whole affair, and it would fundamentally undermine the effectiveness of the movement beyond that period. While Clyde Bellecourt is correct in noting that AIM is still around and that he has been doing the hard work within his community, in many respects the paper wars of the mid-1990s were the closing chapter for the movement that had begun as a community patrol twenty-five years earlier in Minneapolis.

[35] "Split in AIM leads to Charges," *News from Indian Country,* Mid January 1994.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

"[People] like to think the American Indian Movement rolled over after 1973, that Wounded Knee was our final act, after which AIM ceased to exist. I'd like to take them on a tour of Minneapolis and St. Paul and show them all the beautiful things we've developed here since Wounded Knee." [1] - Clyde Bellecourt

While the 1990s marked a defined end for an era of the American Indian Movement, Clyde Bellecourt's invitation to tour the Twin Cities and see what AIM is still up to in the twentieth-first century provides a counter to the idea that AIM completely disappeared in the decades that followed Wounded Knee. The American Indian Movement started out as the small band of activists that sought to counter rampart police brutality and improve the daily lives of the city's urban Indigenous population and even though AIM always remained rooted in the local community around Franklin Avenue, in the twenty-first century it has decidedly returned home as Bellecourt and the other activists who founded it have become elders within their communities. Yet the international engagement that AIM helped promote in the years that followed Wounded Knee continues.

In 2007, thirty years after the Indigenous Peoples conference in Geneva, the United Nations overwhelmingly passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The non-binding resolution endorsed the human rights of Indigenous peoples,

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[1] Clyde H. Bellecourt and Jon Lurie, *The Thunder Before the Storm: The Autobiography of Clyde Bellecourt* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016), 315.

supported indigenous autonomy and sovereignty, and endorsed the significance of upholding treaties between Indigenous peoples and nation-states.[2] A marque moment in Indigenous history, the resolution represented "the dynamic development of international legal norms and reflect the commitment of states to move in certain directions, abiding by certain principles."[3] While UNDRIP passed with 144 votes, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—all countries with difficult Indigenous histories—voted against the resolution; however, in subsequent years, the four have endorsed the resolution to various degrees.[4] Nevertheless, UNDRIP still has its issues. The resolution fails to define indigeneity and skirts recognition of complete Indigenous self-government, thus it "redefined indigenous nations into citizens and ethnic groups" and sought to "enable the participation of indigenous peoples within new and emerging possibilities of democratic multiculturalism."[5] As legal scholar Duane Champagne argues, multicultural nation-states, while a significant improvement, cannot fully account for the needs of Indigenous peoples, who "want to participate in the world and the nation-state, but they

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[2] United Nations, General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A/* 61/295 (12 September 2007), available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf (Accessed on July 15, 2018)

[3] "Frequently Asked Questions: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," available from https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/FAQsindigenousdeclaration.pdf (Accessed on July 15, 2018)

[4] In addition, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Samoa and Ukraine abstained from voting on the resolution at the time.

[5] Duane Champagne, "UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples): Human, Civil, and Indigenous Rights in *Wicazo Sa Review* 28 (Spring 2013), 11, 18.

want to do so informed by their own histories, cultures, and interests."[6] As such, like Wounded Knee for AIM, UNDRIP marked no an ending point, but a beginning to apply these new norms to daily life for Indigenous peoples.

This new era of history played out over the course of this dissertation and in many respects influenced its direction. In particular, the Idle No More and Dakota Access Pipeline protests have highlighted both a new generation of activism, the limitations of the current relationships between Indigenous peoples and nation-states, and the international connections that continue to propel the movements. In 2012, Canadian Indigenous activists formed the Idle No More movement in response to proposed policies by the Conservative-led government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The movement gained additional attention when Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence went on a hunger-strike in an attempt to get a meeting with Harper over the proposed policies. The movement spread not only spread across Canada's First Nations communities, but it also filtered around the world with solidarity protests among Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists extending south to the United States, including in Minneapolis. While the protests were led by a younger generation of activists, Clyde Bellecourt made an appearance and promptly got arrested; the video footage of the incident quickly spread around the Internet.[7]

While Clyde was not involved in coordinating the protest, his appearance allegedly prompted the Minneapolis police department to break up the gathering, ordering

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[6] Ibid., 18.

[7] "Indian Activist Clyde Bellecourt arrested after protest," *Minneapolis StarTribune,* December 27, 2012. Accessed from www.startribune.com/indian-activist-clyde-bellecourt-arrested-after-protest/184762151/ (Accessed on May 25, 2018).

Bellecourt to take it under control because he was "the big chief."[8] Bellecourt, now an elder suffering from various medical problems, still remained a respected and acknowledged leader of Indigenous activism in Minneapolis's native community. Although he remained connected to much of it, however, activism had now moved beyond the American Indian Movement and the old activist organizations of the preceding century.

Four years later in 2016, the United States witnessed further protests in North Dakota over the Dakota Access Pipeline, which sought to transport oil from the tar sands of Canada to refineries in the United States; it would cross land on the Standing Rock Reservation after residents of Bismarck objected to the pipeline crossing north of the capital city. Organizer LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, writing in *Yes!* Magazine, noted that the proposed route for the pipeline would cross sacred grounds on the reservation and threaten twenty-six archaeologically significant sites.[9] The resulting protests, grouped under the #NODAPL hashtag, drew representatives from over three-hundred federally recognized tribes to the Sacred Stone Camp and various other offshoots that also included upwards of 3,000 allies and supporters.[10] While the pipeline was ultimately completed

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[8] Clyde H. Bellecourt and Jon Lurie, *The Thunder Before the Storm: The Autobiography of Clyde Bellecourt* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016), 291.

[9] "Why the Founder of Standing Rock Sioux Camp Can't Forget the Whitestone Massacre," *Yes! Magazine*, September 3, 2016. Accessed from http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/why-the-founder-of-standing-rock-sioux-camp-cant-forget-the-whitestone-massacre-20160903 (Accessed on May 25, 2018).

[10] "Standing Rock: The Biggest Story That No One Is Covering," *Indian Country Today Media Network,* September 8, 2016. Accessed from https://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2016/09/08/standing-rock-biggest-story-no-ones-covering (Accessed on May 25, 2018).

and turned online following the election of Donald Trump, the protest was the largest Indigenous protest since the AIM protests of the 1970s. Groups like Rezpect Our Water and the International Indigenous Youth Council, both created and run by a new generation of Native activists, provided another sign of the vibrancy and power of Indigenous activism into the twentieth-first century.[11]

Both Idle No More and the Dakota Access protests played out over the course of working on this dissertation. At the same time over the last half decade, those activists who took lead the Red Power Era and served as the figureheads for activism of that period have begun to pass away. Among the well-known people to pass on are Dennis Banks, Russell Means, John Trudell, as well as activists such as Carter Camp, an Oklahoma AIM member and Wounded Knee occupier, and Lehman Brightman, a Bay Area activist who founded United Native Americans and took part in various occupations. Many more who were not well-known have undoubtedly also walked on.

There remains a wealth of material and histories that still need to be covered in the period following Wounded Knee. The connections between U.S.-based activists and Canada remains understudied, and the involvement and interplay of groups ranging from the Indigenous-led World Council of Indigenous Peoples as well as non-Native organizations such as Cultural Survival needs further study and incorporation into the narrative. Likewise, the connections and impacts of these international activities to local communities remains undocumented as does a more comprehensive bottom-up accounting of the American Indian Movement and native activism in the latter-half of the

[11] The International Indigenous Youth Council has no connections to the National Indian Youth Council.

twentieth-century. It was true when this dissertation began and it remains true at its conclusion that we still do not possess a full accounting of the history of this period as it relates to those who took part below the level of the major national figureheads.[12]

While there remains history to be written, the events chronicled here showcase how indigenous activists attempted to work themselves into the political frameworks of the second half of the twentieth-century and construct an indigenous space for political discourse that sought to re-write traditional narratives that promoted integration of native issues into the politics of various nation-states. In response, activists worked around the margins to counter traditional ideas of what constituted a nation and re-enforce the idea that Native Americans not only had parallels to indigenous and liberation movements around the world but also that Native Americans were not objects of history books, but a viable political presence on both the national and international level. While uneven and jagged, those discussions continue today.

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[12] Some recent work on these subjects includes Ian Chambers, "The Kootenai War of '74," *American Indian Quarterly* 42 (Winter 2018), 43-86 which looks at an incident in Idaho the following year and provides a local history of one incident of indigenous activism. While Chambers indicates its impossible to tell entirely how the Kootenai incident related to Wounded Knee, he does quote one activist who said they sought to have their protest be a "pen war" rather than something akin to AIM's protests. Scott Rutherford "'We Have Bigotry All Right-but No Alabamas': Racism and Aboriginal Protest in Canada during the 1960s" *American Indian Quarterly* 41 (Spring 2017), 158-179 provides a helpful comparative to many of the issues in Canada and how indigenous activists there related to their southern neighbors.

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